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UNDERSTANDING CONDITIONS LEADING TO HIGH SCHOOL SUCCESS AS  
IDENTIFIED BY URBAN GEORGIA AT RISK STUDENTS

by

CATHERINE M. NIGG

(Under the Direction of Mary Jackson)

ABSTRACT

A qualitative research design was used to gather data from in-depth interviews of 10 at risk students at an east-central Georgia high school. The students met at least two of the following at risk characteristics: low SES, failing at least one grade and/or in danger of failing four or more courses this year, and high rate of suspension or absenteeism and/or on probation. The instruments for this study consisted of structured interviews that contained questions to elicit the students' views on school with the aim of determining what they identify as critical to their success. The interviews were guided by an outline of topics from a review of research and literature concerning at risk student conditions such as family, school and personality issues. The overarching question was: What conditions do at risk high school students identify as critical to their success? Sub-questions: 1. What conditions do at risk students feel are in their lives that affect their academic success? 2. What conditions do at risk students feel are in the school environments that affect their academic success? 3. What conditions do at risk students feel are in their personalities that affect their academic success? The results were combined into three overall conditions that students, themselves, viewed as important to their success:

1. Discipline- Students wanted more supervision for students who kept others from learning and they wanted to be treated respectfully when corrected.
2. Relationships- Students wanted caring teachers who listened and acted as learning partners. Students wanted mentors who could be family members, teachers, coaches or other caring adults.
3. Curriculum- Students wanted courses that addressed their future. They wanted more courses that taught life skills, technical skills, job training or apprenticeships. Students wanted more time to master subject matter, more flexible scheduling for school times and class times. Students also wanted presentations to suit their learning styles, including hands on experiences.

INDEX WORDS: At risk students, preventing high school drop outs, characteristics, interventions, student interviews, College of Graduate Studies, Georgia Southern University

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Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

STATESBORO, GEORGIA

2008

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IDENTIFIED BY URBAN GEORGIA AT RISK STUDENTS

by

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Electronic Version Approved:

December 2008

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to God, who instilled in me the compassion and  
the spirit to serve others.

To my professors, all who encouraged me and supported me throughout this process.

To my students who inspired me to help them find success by giving them a voice.

To my husband without whose patience, support and advice I could not have done this.

To my daughter who inspires me to achieve even higher goals than I  
thought I could accomplish.

To Dr. Lyle Smith who reminded me that persistence wins the race.

To Carlos Ryans and Serr Master Dozier, students whose lives were untimely cut short.

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To all of my students I love each and every one of you. You are all special; I know you can do anything you want to do. Never give up or stop voicing your needs.

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## **I. Introduction**

The term *at risk* was introduced in 1983 in a report titled, *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), which startled Americans on the state of their ability to educate students compared to the world (Sikes, 2002). By 1989, state governors met to “reform and restructure” education in a watershed meeting called the President’s Education Summit at Charlottesville, VA. The framework produced in that meeting resulted in national goals that were expected to be met by 2000 (CBO, 1993).

Critical to these goals was the identification of conditions that placed students “at risk” (Suh, Suh & Huston, 2007; Fortin, Marcotte, Potvin, Royer & Joly, 2006; Weden & Zabin, 2005). The at risk student conditions were studied by researchers beginning with family, and personal status and then by their school’s and teacher’s qualities (Tsoi, 2004; Hein, 2004; Van Duzer, 2006). Researchers followed by implementing interventions to address each of the identified conditions contributing to the student’s inclusion in the at risk category (NCEE, 1983; Van Duzer, 2006). These interventions were met with limited success, leading researchers to realize that the problem was as multi-faceted as the students (Sheppard, 2006). The purpose of this research was to learn the conditions that at risk high school students, themselves, identified as critical to their success.

The aforementioned at risk conditions accumulated by researchers were harvested from census and high school drop-out surveys (NCEE, 1983; Van Duzer, 2006). They considered those conditions in creating interventions that included programs for parental support (Francis-Williams, 2005; O’Sullivan & Russell, 2006), programs to increase student attributes (Royal, 2007; Broussard, Mosley-Howard & Roychoudhury, 2006; Quinn, Poirier, Faller, Gable & Tonelson, 2006), and programs to improve the school

learning environment and teacher's capabilities (Broussard, et al., 2006; Hardy, 2007; Mueller, Giacomazzi & Stoddard, 2006).

In the light of extensive research into the causes of at risk students and interventions and/or programs to help such students, why are an increasing number of "at risk" students dropping out (NCEE, 1983; Mishel & Roy, 2006)? Researchers have discovered that the problems of these students are individual and multi-faceted (Broussard, Mosley-Howard & Roychoudhury, 2006). As a result, students were categorized for more customized interventions (Suh, et al, 2007; Fortin, Marcotte, Potvin, Royer & Joly, 2006; Weden & Zabin, 2005). This too has provided limited results. Using a different approach, Sheppard (2006) asked at risk students who were successful what it was that made them successful, thus, giving researchers' insight into their achievement. Sheppard's (2006) results cited successful at risk students attributing their success to their own personal attributes, leading this researcher to believe that further study of student voices is warranted. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to learn what conditions at risk urban Georgia high school students identify as critical to their success.

## **I.A. Significance of the Study**

### **I.A.1. History**

Implementation of The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was designed to alleviate the achievement gap between those designated as at risk and those achieving at grade level and above by requiring schools to make adequate yearly progress (AYP). The state's assessment scores, used to demonstrate AYP, were required by law, to be disaggregated and publicly reported (The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, 2006). In reporting the scores, sub-groups of students were identified and

were examined to determine AYP. One such subgroup of students was identified as at risk, a term coined as a result of Secretary of Education T. H. Bell's commission's report, *A Nation at Risk* (NCEE, 1983). Additional indicators were added to describe the noted students stating that they fit into one or more of the following categories: involvement in illegal drug use, delinquency, unsafe sex, violence, academic failure, disciplinary problems, grade retention, poor test scores, and at risk of dropping out (Deschamps, 1992; Suh, et al, 2007; Fortin, et al., 2006; Weden. & Zabin, 2005). The result was a flurry of research aimed at finding reasons, determining educational deficits and solutions and placing fault on one condition or another (Broussard, et al, 2006; Hardy, 2007; O'Sullivan & Russell, 2006).

#### **I.A.2. Deficits of at risk students**

Deficits were believed to be the reasons at risk students were not achieving academically. Researchers began by studying the easily accessed data of the students' demographics from both the U.S. Census Bureau (NCEE, 1983) and individual states' demographic data (GADOE, 2007). The demographics of these students were described as coming from families with low socioeconomic status, single parents, and low parental education. Additional data were gathered about the family that included low parental expectations and involvement, high absenteeism and frequent school changes (U.S. General Accounting Office, 2002; O'Sullivan & Russell, 2006; Broussard, et al., 2006; Hardy, 2007). After having identified the home conditions, the students themselves were examined for deficits. The student attributes considered were those of low academic ability, poor academic achievement, lack of motivation, low self-efficacy, lack of personal control and decision-making skills, bad relationships with teachers and peers

and the lack of participation in school activities (Brown, 1999; Kosten, 2000; Marks, 2006; Quinn. et al., 2006; O'Sullivan & Russell, 2006; Mueller, et al., 2006; Reid, 2005). The research then focused on the institutes and instructors who were charged with providing an education to students. The findings were that the schools and teachers were lacking in their ability to educate at risk students (O'Sullivan & Russell, 2006; Hein, 2004; Howard, 2003; Tsoi, 2004; Tarleton, 1992). Many schools were seen as large, impersonal environments that had low expectations for at risk students, yet emphasizing time, effort and finances toward higher performing students. Other conditions identified were inflexible curricula, a focus on test results instead of teaching, retention, social promotion, tracking and grouping students, ineffective special programs and antiquated school structure (Howard 2003; Van Duzer, 2006; Zvoch, 2006). The trickle-down effect did not leave out teachers as a source or contributor to poor achievement of at risk students. Teachers lack of expectation and efficacy, experience, training, instructional differentiation, un-welcome classroom environments, and unmotivating lectures have also received their share of discussion (Tsoi, 2004; Howard, 2003; Hein, 2004). The debate has continued to find additional conditions considered causes of at risk students. Once some of the causes for the deficits were identified researchers began to search for interventions to reduce these problems.

### **I.A.3. Interventions for at risk students**

In an effort to reduce the number of at risk students many programs were implemented. Programs were developed to help parents of these students (Francis-Williams, 2005; O'Sullivan & Russell, 2006). Behavior interventions were examined in alternative schools, (Sigler, 1999; Quinn, et al., 2006) and special programs were



developed to address student needs (Reich, 2004; Yamanchi, 2003; Sikes, 2002; Royal, 2007). The students themselves received the greatest levels of attention with researchers implementing changes in the beliefs and actions of students' peers, both individual students and groups of students, their academic performance expectations, and their perceptions of school and self. Additional interventions were added with extracurricular activities, instructional modifications, student motivation, building relationships between student and teachers and/or mentors, and teaching students ways to think and how to cultivate resiliency (Brown, 1999; Culligan, 2002; Larson, 2005; VanDuzer, 2006; Royal, 2007; Broussard, et al., 2006; Hardy, 2007; Quinn, et al., 2006; Mueller, et al., 2006).

Drop-outs also have been extensively surveyed and studied (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1995). This gave researchers insight into the reasons why they dropped out. That added knowledge and further targeted those identified areas, such as motivation and a feeling of belonging. Some school reform efforts have been focused on addressing some of the needs of at risk students before they dropped out. Some program efforts have targeted other identified risk conditions such as teacher qualifications, parental support, and school structure (Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Sheppard, 2006; Delpit, 1995; Brown, 1999; Yamauchi, 2003; Culligan, 2002). In spite of all efforts, some research indicated that not only were students still dropping out, they may be dropping out at higher rates than before the reform efforts were implemented (GAO, 2002).

### **I.B. Statement of the Problem**

In an effort to alleviate the educational crisis reported in *A Nation at Risk*, at risk students have been studied by their demographics, family and social status, personal attributes, the school structures and by their teachers' qualifications and characteristics. Factors listed by drop-outs, such as academic performance and family circumstances, as well as statistical data gave researchers a basis from which to undertake school reforms, interventions and/or programs addressing the areas they identified as the most significant. Researchers have had some success in meeting the needs in those addressed areas. However, the total impact of these reforms, programs, and interventions has not reduced the drop out rates, with some data indicating that the problem was more complex and multi-faceted. Given that research has addressed the problem from demographic data, data compiled after students have dropped out, and data from at risk students who succeed, this researcher proposed to study the multi-faceted problem from the at risk students' point of view while they are still struggling in high school. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to learn what conditions at risk Urban Georgia high school students identify as critical to their success.

### **I.C. Research Questions**

Overarching Question:

What conditions do at risk high school students identify as critical to their success?

Sub-questions:

1. What conditions do at risk students feel are in their lives that affect their academic success?
2. What conditions do at risk students feel are in the school environment that affect

their academic success?

3. What conditions do at risk students feel are in their personalities that affect their academic success?

#### **I.D. Significance of the Study**

The variables related to at risk students have been analyzed using statistical data and by surveying students who have already dropped out. This researcher proposed that the multi-faceted problem had not been addressed from the view of the at risk student who was still in school. The at risk high school student's voice were important in identifying what is critical to their success. School officials have been required not only to meet AYP but to disaggregate data, identify areas of student weakness and publish them. Policies are then to be developed by school officials. These policies could use the perspective of at risk students to address the weak areas impacting school systems.

The problem of at risk high school students who dropped out impacts not only the community but country as a whole. Dropping out not only reduces the opportunity to earn money, it can decrease the quality of life. It has increased the statistics that students who drop out may become a burden on society by an increased need for financial assistance, health care, public assistance and in its worst case scenario, incarceration. It decreased their capability in the pursuit of happiness and their participation in a free democratic society.

We have now entered the 21<sup>st</sup> century, yet our schools are still modeled on the antiquated factory system of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Researchers need to listen to today's students when facilitating the design of schools and programs that are critical to their success. It is time for education to step into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and that does not mean just

putting a few computers in the classroom, but looking at the needs of today's students and the goals they wish to accomplish, then designing approaches that allow them to succeed.

### **I.E. Autobiographical Roots of the Study**

Personally, I have wanted to give my at risk students a voice. They have always wanted to tell us what they need to succeed. I have wanted to see their thoughts considered and used to design schools and/or programs that address not only student's needs but to prepare all of our students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I have desired to see schools designed to fit the needs of students not ones that require students to fit the needs of the school.

I have been employed in a needs improvement inner city school. Our students have faced many difficult problems among those are poverty, single parent households, many family members living together and coming and going, absent parents, neglect, abuse, early sexual initiation and parenthood, incest, truancy, suspension, academic failure, as well as involvement with law enforcement and mental health officials. Our students have had many challenges everyday, let alone school attendance and success. They have often voiced that no one listens to them and that the coursework is not relevant. Hopefully, by giving these students a voice it will help us find more effective ways of educating them to become successful and develop the resiliency and have the confidence they need to lead a successful and satisfying life.

### **I.F. Procedures**

Research has been gathered on at risk students and drop outs using statistical and survey data. Research did not address the struggling at risk students who were still in

school in regards to conditions they identified as critical to their success. To address this gap in the research a qualitative research design was used to gather data from in-depth interviews of ten at risk students at an urban east-central Georgia high school. In-depth interviews allowed students an opportunity to voice their needs without the constraints of a limited choice type questionnaire or survey and the ability to read on the level of the instrument. An outline containing suggested questions was created and given to the students prior to the interview so they had time to contemplate their answers. The interviews were tape recorded; the tapes were stored in a safe location and were destroyed at the conclusion of this study. A request for permission to interview was received from parents, the county, and school administration, the dissertation committee and the Institutional Review Board.

The urban school was that of an east-central high school. The demographics of the school were: 90% African-American, 8% white and 2% other. The school was eligible for Title I funding, but did not have enough students applying for free and reduced lunch to receive funding, even though all the feeder schools were eligible and were receiving funding. The school was in its second year on the Needs Improvement List for not meeting AYP due to the graduation rate and academic failure. Approximately 60% of the students at this school met at least one of the characteristics for the at risk category.

This study included interviews of ten at risk high school students with at risk behaviors in the same school zone. The at risk students were chosen from those meeting the criteria of two or more of the following attributes: low SES, failing at least one grade and/or in danger of failing four or more courses this year, and high rate of suspension or

absenteeism and/or on probation. Students were also required to submit a legal guardian's signature agreeing to participation in the study.

The instruments for this qualitative study consisted of structured interviews of each student. The interview contained questions to elicit the students' views on school with the aim of determining what they identified as critical to their success. The interviews were guided by an outline of topics from a review of research and literature concerning at risk student factors such as family, school and personality issues. Reliability and validity were addressed using peer review. The peer review was used for question clarity and changes were made. Peer review of the interviews was used for triangulation and reliability of interview themes.

The at risk students were chosen using the data gathered from the guidance department concerning grades, class placement and SES, from the assistant principal of discipline for discipline records, and from the probation officer assigned to this school.

The interviews were conducted in a private location to give students a greater feeling of candor and to eliminate the loss of instructional time. Permission to conduct the study was received from the district superintendent, the school's principal, the legal guardians of the students, the IRB and the dissertation committee members, before the interviews were conducted.

After the students who met the criteria for the study were identified, they were asked to participate. They were given the opportunity to accept or decline without consequence. Questions were modified as needed following the peer review. The students were interviewed and tape recorded; the taped interviews were then transcribed, stored in a safe place and destroyed at the completion of the study. Students were given a copy of

the transcribed interview to make changes they deemed necessary to better reflect their intent. Transcribed interviews were read several times, making notes to determine common themes and trends within the interviewees' responses using an open coding technique (Glesne, 2006). Peer review of the interviews was incorporated and used for triangulation by contributing an analytical analysis. An in-depth analysis of the content of the interviews enabled the researcher to answer the overarching research question: What conditions at risk high school students identify as critical to their success?

It was the intent of this research that the information gained from these interviews would inform the research and that the students' responses would assist school leaders in making decisions that supported at risk students in achieving success. Further, this data could contribute to the school's ability to meet AYP and an increase in the student's pursuit of happiness and their ability to participate in the free democratic society of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The delimitations included but were not limited to those of the sample number, the population selected, the location and manner of the interviews, the type of research design selected, the type of questions included and the type of analysis used.

The limitations of this study included but were not limited to the internal validity factors of student history; such as unvoiced views influencing their responses. Instrumentation could be impacted by the environment of the location, i.e., students may have been uncomfortable in the choice of location. Face-to-face contact may have resulted in altered responses relative to anonymity (more or less open) due to the relationship of the interviewer and the interviewees' desire to look good. Finally, limitations may have been caused due to the interaction of two or more factors (Smith,

2001). The external validity factors may have included but were not limited to the Hawthorne effect, due to students being tape recorded. The sample size was small, decreasing the ability to generalize the results to other settings and groups of students (Smith, 2001).



## II. Review of the Literature

### II.A. History

The National Commission on Excellence in Education released the report, *A Nation at Risk*, under the direction of Terrell H. Bell, the Secretary of Education, in 1983. This report frightened Americans on the state of education, and their ability to dominate the world in commerce, industry, science and technological innovation. The report stated that the educational foundations of our society were being eroded, thus endangering our prosperity, security and civility. It continued by warning readers to seek unity to solve this problem, instead of searching for scapegoats among the victims (NCEE, 1983). The fear of losing their lifestyle overwhelmed the public, giving way to the search for the causes of potentially placing the nation at risk.

The commission's report did not term students at risk, nor did it list their characteristics. It served to list the effects of an ineffective educational system (NCEE, 1983; Bracey, 2003). *A Nation at Risk* contained "Indicators of the Risk" which included conjecture that up to 40% of minority students are functionally illiterate, that SAT scores have dropped by 50 points in verbal and 40 points in math, that science scores were down and that business has to spend increasing amounts of money for remedial education (NCEE, 1983; Bracey, 2003). The report warned to refrain from seeking scapegoats but was ignored and a rush to further identify those conditions that created the at risk student ensued.

As a result of the commission's report, by 1989, state governors met to "reform and restructure" education at the President's Education Summit in Charlottesville, VA. The framework produced in that meeting resulted in national goals, including identification of

at risk conditions and possible interventions, which were expected to be met by 2000 (CBO, 1993). It was this historical event that was the gateway to current educational reform.

Eventually, as a result of the summit, The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) was implemented with an accountability component that requires by law that schools make adequate yearly progress (AYP). The law requires that state assessment scores of certain subgroups be disaggregated and publicly reported (CCSRI, 2006). In practice, this reporting resulted in the scapegoating of students labeled “at risk” further exacerbating the blame the victim’s mentality.

## **II.B. At Risk Student Characteristics**

*A Nation at Risk* considered that minority students were the most likely population to fall under the heading of at risk. One of the indicators stated there was up to a 40% rate of illiteracy, thus beginning the search to determine other characteristics that created the at risk student. Researchers had easy access to the demographic of students from the U.S. Census Bureau (NCEE, 1983) and state demographics (GADOE, 2007) to supply many of the identified characteristics (USGAO, 2002). The characteristics of the at risk students were determined to be those who came from families with low socioeconomic status, single parents, and low parental education, low parental expectations and involvement, high absenteeism, frequent school change, problem behavior and dropping out (Suh & et al., 2007; GAO, 2002; Barton, 2006; Broussard, et al., 2006; Hardy, 2007; Weden & Zabin, 2005). Deschamps (1992) compiled an integrative review of 32 studies on the characteristics of students at risk of dropping out. She determined that the characteristics fit into one of several categories: demographic factors (including social

and family), school related factors, personality factors, and key categories such as those with low grade point averages, those who had been suspended, and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Fortin et. al. (2006) named four subgroups: the anti-social covert behavior, those disinterested in school, school and social adjustment difficulties and the depressed. The subgroups or categories were different due to the researchers focus, furthering researchers to (Broussard et al., 2006; GAO, 2002; Lan & Lanthier, 2003; Zvoch, 2006; Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Fortin, et al., 2006) conclude that the problems of at risk students are individual and multifaceted and resulted from a long process of disengagement. At risk students have had challenges on many fronts resulting from their demographics, their relationship to school and their personal characteristics. Together these conditions have made each individual situation unique, and the traditional factory-type school systems impervious to individual needs.

### **II.B.1. Demographic characteristics**

Demographic characteristics of parental income and parental education, as identified and reported by the GAO (2002), have the strongest relation to dropping out. Other demographic characteristics are race-ethnicity, single-parent home, family mobility, and the siblings' educational attainment (Deschamps, 1992; Barton, 2006). Parents have a strong influence in the amount of involvement with their children's education, their expectations, their educational support, their attitudes about school and the stability of the home (GAO, 2002; O'Sullivan & Russell, 2006; Broussard, et al., 2006; Hardy, 2007). In a study of high school students from 30 countries, Marks (2006) reported that both between- and within-school differences in student performance was only partly attributed to socio-economic factors. Further studies supported the theory that the influence of

parental involvement decreased as the student became older and may not significantly influence high school students (Anderson & Keith, 1997; Barton, 2006).

### **II.B.2. School related characteristics**

Van Duzer (2006) placed great blame regarding the lack of student success on the factory system of education. A student was placed on an assembly line at a predetermined age and then they were required to master that grade's curriculum before moving to the next grade (Van Duzer, 2006; Sikes, 2002; Quinn, et al, 2006). Researchers found that children who faced more challenges at home take longer to learn (Van Duzer, 2006; Sikes, 2002). But, in the current system those students who did not master the curriculum in the prescribed time were then labeled at risk and retained, socially promoted or tested for special services (Van Duzer, 2006; Sikes, 2002). This was compounded by the practice of lowering the expectations for at risk students and spending more time and money on students who were not at risk (Tsoi, 2004; Howard, 2003; Hein, 2004). The need to meet AYP added to the situation by encouraging many teachers to teach for test scores, not to students, resulting in the need to get through the material instead of creating a stimulating curriculum (Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Culligan, 2002). Furthermore, the curricula did not meet the modern needs of the student, thus, further reducing motivation due to lack of relevancy (Van Duzer, 2006; Quinn, et al., 2006). Schools with large numbers of at risk students were often staffed by less experienced teachers who lack efficacy and have lower expectations and training (Hein, 2004; Howard, 2003; Tsoi, 2004; Sheppard, 2006). Schools with a large number of low socioeconomic status students also had an increase of negative influences by peers (Zvoch, 2006; Sikes, 2002; Lan & Lanthier, 2003; Deschamps, 1992).

Large impersonal schools, with or without a large population of low socioeconomic students, can leave students feeling isolated, with a feeling of not belonging with peers and teachers and with a negative perception of school (Lan & Lanthier, 2003; Zvoch, 2006; Cassidy & Bates, 2005). Isolation can be a factor leading to a students' loss of connection to the school. Extracurricular activities, a part of the school connection that helps students remain in school, was often reserved for the higher academically performing students (Lan & Lanthier, 2003; Brown, 1999; Zvoch, 2006).

At risk students faced many challenges from not only the school setting and its curricular requirements, but from teachers without funds or training, from their peers and regulations that often give them a sense of isolation and pushed them out of school.

### **II.B.3. Personality related characteristics**

The students' own personality has a great influence upon academic success or failure and whether they eventually graduate or drop out (Deschamps, 1995; Culligan, 2002).

Personality characteristics of the at risk student included motivation and/or ability.

Motivation and ability were often co- morbid in the same student (Sikes, 2002; Lan & Lanthier, 2003; Fortin, et al., 2006; Anderson & Keith, 1997; Barton, 2006; Brown, 1999). Student motivation was one of the risk factors most commonly cited by researchers (Sikes, 2002; Lan & Lanthier, 2003; Culligan, 2002; Broussard, et al., 2006).

Student motivation can be measured by behavioral and cognitive measures (Anderson & Keith, 1997). Marks (2006) found cognitive ability was the largest predictor of student performance, even greater than socioeconomic factors in his 30 country study. Further studies (Suh, et al., 2007; Fortin, et al., 2006; Lan & Lanthier, 2003; Sikes, 2002; Barton, 2006) found correlations between grade point average and dropping out. Researchers

have found students' ability can affect motivation which further affects performance (Sikes, 2002; Lan & Lanthier, 2003; Fortin, et al., 2006; Anderson & Keith, 1997; Barton, 2006; Brown, 1999).

The lack of academic ability and failing grades dampens the motivation to learn and leads to frustration. Frustration leads to low self-esteem, low self-efficacy and an external locus of control (Anderson & Keith, 1997; Sikes, 2002; Fortin, et al., 2006; Lan & Lanthier, 2003; Broussard, et al., 2006; Culligan, 2002). Academic ability, self-esteem and behavior were closely linked to a student's success. Lan & Lanthier (2003) reported the nine reasons drop-outs cited as to why they dropped out: three were performance issues and six were relationship issues with self and others. As students' self-esteem degraded, a learned helplessness begins to surface (Lan & Lanthier, 2003; Sikes, 2002; Van Duzer, 2006; Anderson & Keith, 1997). This phenomenon combined with the external locus of control left students feeling powerless.

Springing from the feelings of frustration and lack of control, these students were at an increased risk to develop anti-social behaviors (Brown, 1999; Lan & Lanthier, 2003; Broussard, et al., 2006; Quinn, et al., 2006). Student anti-social behavior can be demonstrated in misbehavior that leads to suspension or expulsion or absenteeism (Mueller, Giacomazzi & Stoddard, 2006; Quinn, et al, 2006). Students absent from school without authorization and were truant, were more likely to smoke, drink, use illegal drugs (Reid, 2005), fight and have an earlier sexual initiation (Weden & Zabin, 2005; Fortin, et al; 2006; Suh & Suh, 2007; Broussard, et al., 2006) than their non-truant peers. Absenteeism from suspension or truancy disengaged students from their peers in

school and their teachers resulting in a feeling of rejection and further alienation from school (Lan & Lanthier, 2003).

Violence was a common form of antisocial behavior that may result in out of school suspension. Violence can range from aggressive behaviors such as slapping, pushing, stealing and grappling to much more serious crimes such as aggravated assault, murder and rape (Hein, 2004). Being a victim of a bully was one of the reasons students cited as why they are absent from school (Hein, 2004). Students can feel isolated due to victimization as either the victim or the aggressor.

Isolation is the last step before students dropped out of school (Zvoch, 2006; Fortin, et al., 2006; Lan & Lanthier, 2003). Isolation can be either physical such as out of school suspension, truancy and absenteeism or psychological such as withdrawal from extracurricular activities or academic participation or motivation, a feeling of external locus of control, and frustration (Zvoch, 2006; Fortin, et al., 2006; Broussard, et al., 2006; Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Lan & Lanthier, 2003).

At risk behaviors that often led to dropping out is a gradual process. It can begin with a student deviating from the social norm leading to a reduction in school activities thus reducing identification to school values, alienation and finally a disconnection from school (Zvoch, 2006; Fortin, et al., 2006; Broussard, et al., 2006; Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Lan & Lanthier, 2003).

Researchers have examined a plethora of issues that may have placed students at risk including family, school and personality. In the quest to keep at risk students in school and succeed academically, researchers have developed programs and interventions.

## **II.C. Interventions for at Risk Students**

Researchers, having identified conditions that created at risk students, turned their research to ways to address those conditions. Many addressed conditions pertaining to a student's demographic factors such as parental relationships and community environments. Schools addressed such conditions as curriculum, programs and professional development of teachers.

### **II.C.1. Interventions aimed at demographic factors**

The GAO (2002) reported that family income and parental involvement were the two strongest conditions in determining whether or not a student would drop out. Other demographic characteristics were race-ethnicity, single-parent home, family mobility, and the siblings' educational attainment (Deschamps, 1992; Barton, 2006).

Researchers have found that parents were frequently overlooked as intervention participants for at risk students (Francis-Williams, 2005). Students Achieve When Families Have Faith, Inspiration, Resources, and Education (SAFFIRE) Program was a program designed to help African-American parents of students who exhibit anti-social behaviors. The program was aimed at giving parents guidance and support by providing education, social and spiritual support and training. The eight-week course was offered in a church setting to give parents a less threatening environment. The program found success in the areas of an increase in self-esteem and perceived social support and a decrease in parent-related stress. The researchers concluded that more programs need to be designed to address anti-social behaviors and more programs need to be researched and developed to help parents deal with children with anti-social behaviors (Francis-Williams, 2005).



O'Sullivan & Russell (2006) stated that there was a "blame cycle" with professionals and parents colliding over the responsibility of a student's success. O'Sullivan & Russell (2006) further stated that as part of a solution, parenting and behavior management classes could be offered as well as an effort by staff to reach out to parents to find common goals and to create an environment of cooperation with all celebrating achievements. Hardy (2007) continued the thought of building connections between home and school, as important to reach at risk students by adding more business and community involvement. Many at risk students live in poor neighborhoods filled with violence where their families have less time to supervise school related activities (Barton, 2006). Community violence has been addressed in some communities by focusing on mental health issues, cooperative efforts, and psychoeducation. Hardy (2007) reported of services provided to families living in violent communities. In Washington, DC one group called Free Advice, Inc., provides mental health counseling to victims of violence, either in school or at home. Reaching Out to Others Together (ROOTS) is a neighborhood activist anti-violence group. Peaceaholic is an antiviolence group for teens, which has programs and speakers to teach teen empowerment and there is a better way than violence (Hardy, 2007).

Socio-economic factors, as reported by Marks (2006), were only partly attributed to student performance. Further studies reported that the influence of parental involvement decreased as the student becomes older and may not significantly influence high school students (Anderson & Keith, 1997; Barton, 2006). The roots of at risk-ness went beyond mere demographics; it was only a fragment of the complete picture that created these students.

### **II.C.2. Interventions aimed at school relations**

When looking for a scapegoat, schools received their share of the blame for the lack of student success. NCLB (2001) has their accountability pillar aimed directly at schools. Not only does it have requirements in which schools have to prove their ability to educate students, but it has other benchmarks and standards schools must meet. Accountability, a multifaceted concept itself, is not bad, but it has had a voice in culpability blaming student failure on the schools regardless of other factors.

In pursuit of meeting AYP, many schools have developed programs to meet some of the issues of at risk students as well as to close the achievement gap between student subgroups. The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement (2006) stated that trying to fix a subgroup was the wrong approach for school success because subgroup failure was a symptom of overall school issues that need to be addressed. In addition, schools that were successful in educating all students, use a comprehensive reform that addressed multiple factors. After studying practices of high-performing, high-poverty schools, The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement in 2006, found seven common approaches: “high expectations for all students, an emphasis on academics and instruction for all students, systems for regularly assessing all students, focus on collaborative decision making, developing and maintaining a strong work ethic and high morale, and the purposeful recruitment, hiring and assignment of teachers”. When evaluating educational programs, all seven approaches should be considered.

Barton (2006) reported on four programs that have addressed at risk students using different combinations of approaches. The first program, The Talent Development High School, a collaboration between two universities, the community and the school, that

focused on small learning communities, curriculum reforms, professional development, longer class periods, interdisciplinary teams of teachers, and employer advisory boards. The second, Communities in Schools, was a program that used community agencies partnering with the school to provide resources to students such as counseling, volunteers and mentors, remedial education, tutoring, classes teaching life skills and employment-related topics, and a variety of after-school programs. Third, the Maryland Tomorrow's program has counseling, intensive academic instruction during the school year and summer, adult mentors and career guidance and exploration. The fourth, The Quantum Opportunities Program, gave supplemental year round services to at risk students, which included tutoring, homework assistance, computer-assisted instruction, life and family skills training, supplemental after-school education, developmental activities, mentoring, community service activities, and financial planning. Each program addressed many of the seven common approaches for school reform.

Further programs were addressing at risk students with different approaches. Osborn & Reardon (2006) researched a program that used the Cognitive Information Processing (CIP) career theory to help at risk middle school students develop interpersonal skills and increase occupational knowledge. Reich's (2004) qualitative study on a youth apprenticeship program found students were empowered by supportive relationships with others, educational experiences in school and post-secondary, career empowerment and self-empowerment. Sikes (2002) researched a program for at-risk rising ninth graders called Learners, Educators and Parents (LEAP) that was designed to help with the transition into high school. Yamauchi (2003) described a program in Hawaii for at risk students that built its curriculum around weekly community field work with teachers and

mentors. Brown (1999) researched the connection between extracurricular activity and antisocial behavior finding antisocial behavior is decreased by combining extracurricular activities and school connections. Each of these programs has seen some success, but one of the biggest conditions of creating its success involved the teachers.

Research has shown that academic performance increased when teachers were well trained and supported by their administration (Fleming, 2005). Teacher leaders, collaborative decision making and professional learning communities (Brill, 2002) created and fostered the innovative capacity of teachers giving students and teachers the means to enact and imagine novel approaches to teaching and learning. When students collaborated with teachers in ways to teach and learn, it built a connection. Students were hard-wired for close attachments to others, craving it and doing almost anything to receive it (Larson, 2005; Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Brendtro & Longhurst, 2005).

Welcoming classrooms and a strong relationship with teachers gave students the motivation to participate in learning as well as a positive strategy in preventing classroom violence (Hein, 2004; Sheppard, 2006; Culligan, 2002; Cassidy & Bates, 2005).

Mentoring was another way to build connections with students. Mentoring can be a positive relationship that guided students to reach the goals of academic success, pro-social behaviors, reduced truancy, build social skills, self-confidence and a sense of belonging (Fleming, 2005; Reid, 2005; Brown, 1999; Brendtro & Longhurst, 2005).

Giving students a feeling of connection with school can be built by the administration and the teachers by creating a positive environment. It can allow students to create and reach common goals that serve to increase academic and social performance and ultimately allow schools to meet AYP.

### **II.C.3. Interventions related to personality characteristics**

Connections to the school, a welcoming classroom, and strong relationships with teachers as well as a sense of relevance in the curriculum were some of the conditions that contributed to a positive student motivation to learn (Culligan, 2002; Yamauchi, 2003; Fortin, et al., 2006). Students wanted to feel respected and to be treated fairly (Quinn, et al., 2006; Culligan, 2002; Brendtro & Longhurst, 2005; Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Delpit, 1995). Teachers can foster those feelings and trust in their students with encouragement and praise for effort (Wright, 2006; Sheppard, 2006). When students felt valuable to others, their self-worth increased and they developed a more positive self-concept (Laursen, 2005; Sheppard, 2006). Respect for students should be given unconditionally and not based on an agenda; furthermore, teachers needed to model respect with other teachers and adults (Cassidy & Bates, 2005). Teachers who respected and cared for their students wanted to see them succeed (Culligan, 2002; Delpit, 1995; Wright, 2006; Brown & Skinner, 2007; Cassidy & Bates, 2005).

Researchers recommended adapting the curriculum in ways that enabled every student to learn and succeed without disregarding rigor (Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Delpit, 1995). Success can counteract the negative influences of neighborhood, peers, and schools (Sheppard, 2006; Laursen, 2005). Successful at risk students cited good teachers and overall belief in self as reasons they succeeded (Sheppard, 2006; Cassidy & Bates, 2005). These success students felt supported by concerned adults who were encouraging, not forceful, and allowed them more freedom to experiment and grow (Larson, 2005; Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Broussard, et al., 2006). When students felt free to experiment they were more likely to want more ownership in their learning. Students developed that ownership

when they were given choices (Larson, 2005). Researchers cited even modest choice-making, like choosing a book or assignment and seating, created a sense of autonomy (Wright, 2006). Allowing students to have responsibility helped develop this trait and ultimately it taught them to think through their options and further their ownership (Larson, 2005). Students were then be able to move beyond helplessness and they were able to develop an intrinsic locus of control and higher self-esteem.

A higher self-esteem was not only important to success it is also associated with more positive interactions with teachers, peers and the school in general (Broussard, et al., 2006; Laursen, 2005; Brendtro & Longhurst, 2005; Cushman, 2003). When problems were treated as opportunities for learning and growth, a healthy resiliency developed (Brendtro & Longhurst, 2005). Researchers define resiliency as a combination of internal strength and external supports which provides the ability to bounce back and maintain a positive outlook after stressful or traumatic life conditions, coping well with high levels of ongoing disruptive change, without acting in dysfunctional or harmful ways (Broussard, et al., 2006; Laursen, 2005; Brendtro & Longhurst, 2005; Siebert, 2005). Brooks & Goldstein (2003) listed the five major factors from a forty year study of a population of children born in Hawaii, from Werner & Smith's book *Journeys from Childhood to Midlife: Risk, Resilience, and Recovery*. The results boiled down to the two major themes of strong, positive, close relationships and satisfaction with school/work and the state of their lives. (p. 262) Brendtro & Longhurst (2005) cite Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern's Circle of Courage Model stating that there were four growth needs for all children across all cultures. They were belonging, mastery, independence and generosity. Developmentally, they were termed: attachment,

achievement, autonomy and altruism. When students participated in designing their learning, it gave them that sense of belonging, it built that relationship with their teachers and peers, it built that connection to the school and it decreased anti-social behaviors (Lan & Lanthier, 2003; Wright, 2006; Cushman, 2003). It helped students fulfill all four growth needs and instilled a desire for lifelong learning (Brown & Skinner, 2007).

The Brown-Skinner (2007) five step model for building trust with at risk students was based on meaningful communication. The first step in the model was to listen to the students before trying to prescribe advice. Step two was validating the student's feelings. Step three activated problem-solving techniques such as role play. Step four was giving students a positive regard to build trust and unconditional caring. Step five was hope, hope for the future, a dream of a better life, and the hope of the teacher to re-engage the learning process.

Building a trusting relationship and teaching responsibility so that students will be empowered required communication. The decision-making process depended on communication from all involved, yet the student was often left out of educational decisions. Larson (2005) reported of a survey that revealed that teens feel they only have a voice twenty percent of the time. Students' voices were rarely heard, especially those from disempowered and dominated communities, when debating school failure and success (Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Couch & Francis, 2006; Delpit, 1995). But, being a part of that decision-making process was an important component in student-school bonding that gave students a feeling of power, control, ownership and participation concerning how their school was run (Quinn, et al., 2006; Couch & Francis, 2006; Wright, 2006; Delpit, 1995; Cushman, 2003). In an interview of students at an alternative school, when

asked what they wanted to tell new teachers, many of the students replied that they wanted not only teachers who cared about them but they wanted someone who would listen to them (Cassidy & Bates, 2005).

Eighty percent of the time students felt they were not being listened to about things that affected their lives. No wonder students were still dropping out at increasing rates regardless of interventions and programs that have been implemented to address at risk students (Larson, 2005; GAO, 2002). The problems of at risk students were as multifaceted as the students (Broussard, et al., 2006; Sikes, 2002). The solutions should be just as individualized as the needs of the student (Cassidy & Bates, 2005). To create individualized plans for students, teachers needed to communicate with them to discover their needs. Researchers (Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Sheppard, 2006; Delpit, 1995; Brown, 1999; Yamauchi, 2003; Culligan, 2002; Cushman, 2003) have interviewed students after they dropped out, students who were in special programs or schools and students who were at risk and are succeeding, but no one has asked struggling at risk students what they needed to succeed. It was best to go to the at risk student to discover what they needed. They have been in school the greater part of their lives and they know what has worked for them and what did not (Quinn, et al., 2006).

#### **II.D. Reviewed Literature Summary**

Tables 1-3 reveal the key components and results of the studies noted in the literature review for each sub-question, respectively. These studies have been described in the literature review and their designs and outcomes used as guidelines in this study.



**Table 1.** What conditions in their lives do at risk students feel affect their academic success: studies related to at risk student demographic characteristics.

<b>Study</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Design/Analysis</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>
Deschamps, A. B. (1995)	Examined research from 1980 to 1992 that address characteristics of high school dropouts.	32 empirical studies	Empirical	Four major categories of dropout characteristics: demographics, social and family, deviant behavior in society, and in-school.
Francis-Williams, N. (2005)	Proposed a program that focuses on the parents and caregivers as vital persons in the prevention, intervention, rehabilitation, and therapeutic solution for students with anti-social behaviors.	11 African-American parents	Parenting Stress Index, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support and Anecdotal data collected in focus group discussion, and informal interviews.	Self-esteem slightly increased, parenting related stress and perceived social support increased insignificantly; Anecdotal data revealed positive relationships between the treatment and the outcomes with increased in self esteem and

				perceived social support.
Sikes, E. K. (2002)	Evaluated an instructional teaming program with first time at-risk ninth grade students.	First time ninth grade at risk students at a high school participating in LEAP	Student record analysis of data	Statistically significant difference in the passing English, but not math, or promotion to the tenth grade, returned to school the following year or graduated.
Tarleton, D. (1992)	Examined the development of programs and strategies to help teachers included a variety of instructional behaviors that stimulate many kinds of student thinking.	Voluntary teachers and a control group	Videotaping, retention, questionnaires, application and standardized test	Students in the experimental group achieved significantly better.
Tsoi, M. Y. (2004)	Described the types of computer activities assigned in different track-	29 science teachers and 1,070 students	Mixed methods: Teacher interviews and student surveys	Lower track students received fewer activities, less content, changed content and

	levels in secondary science and discover the ways teachers differentiated computer activities between classes of dissimilar tack-levels and in relation to student demographics.			changed activities and lower requirements.
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**Table 2.** What conditions in their school environment do at risk students feel affect their academic success: studies related to school related characteristics.

<b>Study</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Design/Analysis</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>
Brill, J. M. (2002)	Explored the dimensions that foster and sustain teachers as innovators and schools as innovative places for improved teaching and learning.	Elementary school	Ethnographic, single case design by individual and focus group interviews, observations, document analysis and researcher self-interviews.	Alignment, connectedness and inquiry are the 3 dimensions that enable the school to create and recreate the school community.
Brown, R.A.	The impact of	Secondary	Multiple	EAP and school

(1999)	extracurricular activity was mediated by a youth's sense of connection to the school.	students from 2 school districts, N=1,756.	regression analysis, survey	connection were significantly related to a decreased likelihood of youth problem behavior.
Fleming, R. A. (2005)	The purpose was to determine whether a combination of 3 criteria lead to increased graduation rates.	12 Youth challenge administrators, and their students GED scores for 3 years	Internet survey and GED scores	It was beneficial for students to have a low student/teacher ratio, a stable productive mentor and a curriculum that used multi intelligences.
Hein, K. D. (2004)	Described the strategies used by school teachers identified as extraordinary at preventing aggressive behavior in the classroom.	2 middle school teachers	Case study In-depth interview and 14 informal interviews	A positive classroom climate was the strongest indicator for the prevention of aggression.
Howard, N. M. (2003)	Investigated differences in teacher efficacy and expectations	36 elementary students, 722 elementary students	Scales for teachers: Efficacy and expectation	There was no significance for race and gender or teacher

	for different types of students by student race, gender, grade level, and behavioral cluster.		measure, Teacher efficacy and attribution measure and teacher efficacy scale. Students: Behavior assessment scale, Sanford Achievement test, grades and discipline	perception of their ability. There was a decline in teacher efficacy with an increase in problem behavior.
Reich, L. S. (2004)	Explored and illuminated the experiences and opinions of students who have participated in a high school youth apprenticeship program.	20 students, graduates of program	Case study with personal interviews	Supportive, meaningful relationships with others (mentors, peers, adults) were important to student success
Sigler, S. (1999)	Decreased confrontation among African American females at an alternative evening school.	270 alternative school students	Survey, teacher perception scale, records, logs and data	Program had a positive result with decreased confrontational behavior during implementation and a positive impact on school climate and

				academic instruction.
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**Table 3.** What conditions in their personalities do at risk students feel affect their academic success: studies related to personality characteristics.

Study	Purpose	Participants	Design/Analysis	Outcomes
Culligan, J. J. (2002)	Examined middle school student ideas about school life, their perceptions of their classroom cultures, their perceptions of their experiences at school, and their interactions with those around them to understand what qualities in their learning environment influenced their motivation to learn.	4 middle school students	Case studies and a cross-case analysis	A welcoming classroom culture and strong relationship with teachers were prerequisites for students' willingness to engage in learning and teaching methods that were more active than passive are motivating.
Kosten, P.A. (2000)	Constructed, refined, and tested a measure	Adolescent focus groups	Survey	Peer susceptibility was multidimensional

	of adolescent peer susceptibility.			and consisted of seven dimensions. Male and females differed significantly.
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## **II.E. Summary of Literary Approaches**

*A Nation at Risk* (1983) began the search for the causes of students at risk and the academically unsuccessful. These students have been categorized by their demographics, by the school efficacy and by characteristics in their personalities to discover the origin of their status. The shift was then placed on finding solutions for their condition. Programs have been implemented to improve a student's home conditions, neighborhood conditions and community services. School reform has been enacted to create programs and environments in which at risk students can succeed more readily and programs have been employed to help students learn how to learn. Many of these interventions have found success, but there were many students who were still falling through the cracks in the educational system. Researchers have interviewed students who have dropped. They have interviewed students who were at risk but were succeeding. However, they have not interviewed students who were at risk and still struggling yet persisting. Struggling at risk students have not been interviewed even in light of research stating students who participated in decisions about their education were more likely to succeed. There was this lack of research even though these students have been in school for many years and they know what they needed and what hindered their success. They knew if their home/community environments were detrimental to their education. They knew if the

school they were attending was not a fit for their needs. And they knew if it was a problem that was within them. They needed to be asked; they needed a voice. The purpose of this research was to interview struggling at risk high school students to determine the conditions that they believed would add to their academic success.



### **III. Procedure**

#### **III.A. Introduction**

At risk students have been the focus of educational researchers and politicians since the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983. Later research indicated that many of the assumptions made by *A Nation at Risk* were faulty. That publication frightened Americans about the state of education and its resulting effect on their life styles. The public looked to the politicians who in turn looked at the schools to find the cause of declining educational attainment. Researchers determined many causes for students to be considered at risk. These causes were extensively studied by researchers. Politicians placed a great deal of the blame on the school, which resulted in new laws which extensively regulated the educational system. Interventions and programs were enacted to address the latest researched problem. Many of these interventions and programs saw success, but none of them had a significant impact. The problem of at risk students dropping out is still increasing. The at risk student is a multi-faceted, individual person. They have many different reasons why they are not succeeding academically. Researchers have asked students who have dropped out why they did so, and they have investigated reasons at risk students have succeeded, but they have yet to give a voice to the struggling at risk student. Struggling at risk students knew what they needed to succeed yet current research has not included their voices. The purpose of this qualitative study was to give those students a voice, so that educators and politicians may understand and take into consideration the conditions they identify as critical to their success.

The overarching question was elaborated upon with sub-questions to address each of the different areas of demographics, school environment and personality characteristics.

Qualitative research was used to understand the lives and perceptions at risk students have concerning their educational needs. Epistemological constructivism was used because it was important to understand student's perspectives when making decisions concerning educational reforms as they are the ones most impacted by those decisions. There was a detailed description of the student characteristics used to determine participation, as well as the school setting where they attended. The questions for the interviews were included on a chart with the relevant research question and researchers. The interview questions were submitted to peers for review and amended for clarity. Finished interviews were presented for peer review and to help determine themes and trends. Interview procedures, data analysis, and limitations/ delimitations were also presented.

### **III.B. Research Questions**

Overarching Question:

What conditions do at risk high school students identify as critical to their success?

Sub-questions:

1. What conditions do at risk students feel are in their lives that affect their academic success?
2. What conditions do at risk students feel are in the school environment that affects their academic success?
3. What conditions do at risk students feel are in their personalities that affect their academic success?

### **III.C. Research Design**

“Qualitative research is an umbrella term that covers many different constructivist ...research approaches” “and its methods are used to understand some social phenomena from the perspectives of those involved...and sometimes to transform or change social conditions” (Glesne, 2006, p. 4-5). Qualitative research has given researchers insight into struggling at risk students views through the epistemology of constructivism.

Constructivism allowed the expression of views of the world without being more or less right than others (Glesne, 2006). A non-judgmental atmosphere allowed students to be more open in their responses.

Case study is a paradigm that “promotes discovery, insight, and interpretation in context, and offers a significant contribution to the knowledge base and practice of education” (Merriam, 1988, p. 13). Data were gathered through the ethnographic tool of in-depth interview (Glesne, 2006). In-depth interviews can be used to explore and probe for additional information and unanticipated answers occur that have led to new findings (Nardi, 2006).

In-depth interviews, in this study, gave students the opportunity to voice their needs without the constraints of a limited choice type questionnaire or survey and the ability to read on the level of the instrument. It also allowed them to expand into areas of concern not previously considered. An outline of the proposed questions was given to the students prior to the interview so they could have time to contemplate their answers.

### **III.D. Population**

An urban high school in an east-central Georgia was the site from which the students were chosen. The demographics of the school of approximately 1100 students were:

90% African-American

8% White

2% Other

The school was eligible for Title I funding, but did not currently have enough students applying for free and reduced lunch to receive the funding. All of the feeder schools were Title I eligible. The school was in its second year on the Needs Improvement List for not meeting AYP due to the graduation rate and academic failure. Approximately 60% of the students met one or more of the characteristics for the at risk category.

The study consisted of ten struggling at risk high school students. The at risk students were chosen from those meeting the criteria of two or more of the following attributes:

- a) Low SES
- b) Failing at least one grade and/or in danger of failing 4 or more courses this year
- c) High rate of suspension or absenteeism and/or on probation

The chosen students lived in this school zone. Students were required to submit a legal guardian's signature agreeing to participation in the study.

### **III.E. Sample**

The sample size was 1% of the student population at this high school. This size was chosen to represent the at risk school's population without having a sample size too large to conduct in-depth interviews, yet large enough to elicit different views. It was gender representative. The sample size came from a pool gathered using guidance department records, assistant principal discipline records and probation officer records. A request for the study and permission to access data was sought and obtained from the superintendent of the school system and the school's principal. (see Appendix 1 & 2)

### **III.F. Instrumentation**

The instrument was interview questions that were prepared and linked to research and the research questions. The in-depth interviews were tape recorded; the tapes were stored in a safe place until the conclusion of the study when they were destroyed. The interview questions and research have been included. (see Table 4)

### **III.G. Validation**

The study consisted of in-depth interview questions designed to elicit student's voices concerning the conditions they felt were critical to their success. The interviews were guided by questions relating to topics from a review of literature and studies concerning at risk student conditions. A peer review of the interview questions was used for validity and reliability (Glesne, 2006). The questions were then adjusted as needed. Anonymous peer review, by professors, administrators and teachers, of the interviews was used for triangulation and reliability of the interview themes (Glesne, 2006). Transcripts of the interviews were presented to peers to review and examined for topic and trends. Based upon peer review, adjustments and additions were made to include those views.

### **III.H. Data Collection**

The students were chosen using the data gathered from the guidance department records concerning grades, SES, placement and attendance, from the assistant principal of discipline for discipline records, and from the probation officer assigned to this school.

Chosen students had to return a letter with a legal guardian's signature agreeing to participation in the subject. (Appendix 3) The students who met the criteria chose a pseudonym to protect their identity. Prior to the interviews, permission was sought and

received from the Superintendent of the school district (see Appendix A), from the school's principal (see Appendix B), from the dissertation committee and from the IRB.

Students were given a copy of the interview questions prior to the interview. The interviews were conducted in a private location to give students a greater feeling of openness, to eliminate the loss of instructional time and for privacy. The interviews were conducted and tape recorded. The interviews lasted 45 minutes to an hour. The taped interviews were transcribed and stored in a safe location until they were destroyed at the conclusion of the study.

### **III.I. Response Rate**

The response rate was determined by the return of permission letters. Only two of the students approached did not return the letter. One was due to the inability to locate the parents and the other due to an extended work schedule. The interview time and location were then determined and interviews were conducted. The researcher continued this procedure until ten students, five male and five female, were interviewed in-depth.

### **III.J. Data Analysis**

Upon completion of the interviews, each recording was transcribed. After the interviews were transcribed, the students were given a copy to review and to make changes they felt were necessary. The transcribed interviews were read several times while making notes to determine common themes and trends within the interviewee's responses. Peers were presented transcribed interviews for review and determination of themes and trends, additions and adjustments were made by the researcher to incorporate peer input. An open coding technique, of classifying and categorizing themes, was used (Glesne, 2006). An in-depth analysis of the content of the interviews enabled the

researcher to answer the overarching question and sub questions: What conditions do at risk high school students identify as critical to their success? The results can be used to inform the literature concerning at risk students voices about their academic success, experiences, values and opinions, knowledge, and feelings (Merriam, 1988).

### **III.K. Reporting the Data**

The resulting data from the coded interviews was used to answer the research question and the sub-questions. Student responses were reported under each of the research questions, using a comparing and contrasting technique. The purpose of in-depth interviews was to inform the knowledge base and to contribute to theory (Merriam, 1988).

### **III.L. Tabular Summary of Literature Survey Questions**

These questions were used as raw material from which the author developed questions for this study. They were also developed using current research and the relevance to each sub-question in this study is noted.

**Table 4.** Literature interview questions and item analysis.

Question	Research	Research Question
Have you been retained?	Van Duzer, Sikes, Quinn	Sub 1
Are your parents concerned about your grades?	O'Sullivan & Russell	Sub 1
Do your parents make a difference concerning your grades?	Anderson & Keith, Barton	Sub 1
Does your community make a difference concerning school?	Anderson & Keith, Barton	Sub 1
Do you feel you can learn the	VanDuzer, Sikes, Quinn	Sub 2

material given enough time?		
Do you think different learning styles would help you learn?	Van Duzer, Sikes, Quinn	Sub 2
Do you feel the curriculum is relevant to your life?	Cassidy, Culligan	Sub2
Do your peers influence your participation in class?	Zvoch, Sikes, Lan & Lanthier, Deschamps	Sub 2
Do your peers influence your extracurricular activities?	Broussard, Culligan, Barton, Brown	Sub 2
Do your grades influence your classroom participation?	Sikes, Lan, Fortin, Anderson, Barton	Sub 2
Do your grades influence your classroom participation?	Sikes, Lan, Fortin, Anderson, Barton, Broussard	Sub 2
Do you miss a lot of school due to suspension?	Mueller, Lan	Sub 2,3
When you miss school do you feel isolated when you return?	Zvoch	Sub 2,3
Do you get in a lot of fights at school?	Hein	Sub 2,3
Are you the aggressor? Or the Victim?	Hein	Sub 2, 3
Do you participate in extracurricular activities?	Brown, Zvoch, Fortin, Lan, Cassidy	Sub 2,3
Do you feel the administration listens to you?	Fortin, Zvoch, Lan, Cassidy	Sub 3
Do you feel the teachers listen to you?	Fortin, Zvoch, Lan, Cassidy	Sub 3
Would an apprentice program increase your success?	Yamauchi, Barton	Sub 2
Would community services	Barton, Yamauchi	Sub 2



available in your school help you succeed?		
Does a good relationship with your teacher matter to your success?	Fleming, Brill, Barton	Sub 2, 3
Does a bad relationship with your teacher matter to your success?	Fleming, Brill, Barton	Sub 2, 3
How well does your teacher know you?	Cassidy, Bates, Larson	Sub 2, 3
Is it important to you?	Culligan, Shepard, Hein	Sub 2, 3
Do you feel school prepares you for the real world?	Culligan, Sheppard, Yamauchi	Sub 2, 3
Do you feel you belong at school?	Hein, Brown, Culligan	Sub 2, 3
Do you have someone to turn to when you need advice? Peer? Teacher? Parent? Coach?	Brown Brendtro, Fleming, Reid	Sub 2, 3
What factor to attribute to your success?	Sheppard	Sub 2, 3
Do you have a mentor?	Sheppard, Broussard, Brown	Sub 2, 3
Has anyone asked you to participate in decisions that affect your learning?	Brown, Larson, Culligan	Sub 3
Has anyone asked you how you learn best?	Cassidy, Larson	Sub 3
Has anyone asked you your opinion at school?	Cassidy, Brown, Larson	Sub 3
What advice would you give new teachers? Administrators?	Cassidy, Bates, Brill	Sub 3
What would your ideal school look like? Subjects, schedules?	Cassidy, Bates, Brill	Sub 3

### **III.M. Summary of Methodology**

Qualitative research was designed to discover the truth, the perceived truth of individual realities, to understand another and to create a change. This study was designed to give at risk students a voice, to hear their truth, to understand their lives and to help them create a change for the better by informing literature. This study was designed to interview 10 at risk students in-depth, who were chosen by meeting a set at risk criteria. The criteria were gleaned from guidance department, assistant principal and probation officer records. Permission was sought from the legal guardians of the students, from the superintendent of the school district, the school principal, the dissertation committee and the IRB. The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed using an open coding method to determine themes and trends. Those themes and trends were compared and contrasted and used to answer the research questions. The research can be used to inform the literature and to contribute to theory.

## **IV. Data and Data Analysis**

### **IV.A. Introduction**

This research project aimed to determine the conditions that currently enrolled at risk high school students identify as critical to their success. A group of ten students in an urban school, determined to be at risk, were each individually interviewed and their answers examined for trends and themes which indicated conditions and possible interventions critical to their success.

### **IV.B. Research Questions**

Answers to the following sub-questions collectively provided the conditions that at risk students considered critical to their academic success:

Sub-questions:

1. What conditions do at risk students feel are in their lives that affect their academic success?
2. What conditions do at risk students feel are in the school environment that affects their academic success?
3. What conditions do at risk students feel are in their personalities that affect their academic success?

### **IV.C. Research Design**

Each student, identified as at risk, was interviewed face-to-face, in a private location, with their identity held anonymous. The interviews focused heavily on questions designed from current research to develop interventions and programs to assist at risk students. The correlated research results found trends or themes from different sub-questions.

#### IV.D. Raw Data/Findings

The raw data was presented in three stages:

- 1) some significant at risk factors for the interviewees
- 2) a tabulation containing all responses
- 3) comments from individual students relevant to each sub-question

##### IV.D.1. Individual factors

Table 5 lists some key at risk factors for interviewees. Notice that most students have multiple factors. Some have them all. The names were pseudonyms chosen by the students.

**Table 5.** Individual at risk factors.

Student	Low SES	Failing 1 or more grades	Failing > 3 courses this year	Suspended often	Absent often	Probation	Addn. Info
Abby	X	X			X	X	Alcoholic mother, father is a long haul trucker
Addikiss	X	X					Bi-racial lives only with father
Bernard	X	X		X			In at risk group, beginning to excel

Chris	X	X		X			
Destiny	X	X		X	X		Lives with sister, mother dead
Fred	X	X	X	X	X	X	Gang member, doesn't know location of parents
Gary	X	X	X	X	X	X	Gang member
Nicole	X	X			X		
Saye	X	X		X	X		Pregnant
Tracy	X	X	X	X	X		Mother dead, lives with aunt and sister

#### **IV.D.2. Student voices per sub-question**

The primary question in this study was: What conditions do at risk high school students identify as critical to their success?

Sub Question #1:

What conditions do at risk students feel are in their lives that affect their academic success?

The students in this study reported that their parents' involvement, by and large, consisted of phrases such as "you can do better". Tracy and Saye have siblings who

encouraged and helped them to do better. Saye and Chris's parents have not been involved in their education for years. Half of the students interviewed still believe their family was the most important influence for their grades. Tracy said she has a close-knit group of family and friends who both encouraged and helped her with her grades. Friends, grades and teachers tied for the second most influential factors cited for wanting to achieve good grades. Abby, Destiny and Fred reported that teachers helped when they breakdown the work so that it is understandable. Gary placed influence on the grades themselves stating, "when you get grades, you want to keep them". Saye added to that thought stating that she wanted a great GPA so she can get accepted in some colleges.

#### Sub Question #2:

What conditions do at risk students feel are in the school environment that affects their academic success?

For Fred the biggest environmental condition contributing to his lack of academic success was the teaching format, "it's like they jump from one thing and go to the next, like Chapter 1 and then next week Chapter 2 before you even know the rest of Chapter 1". Nicole indicated that "sometimes they could go over stuff and then I still wouldn't get it and the next thing we know we got a test and I just... I failed it or I just don't do it at all". One student felt it depended on the material covered. Chris worried about missing time due to his work schedule, and Tracy was concerned because she had so many difficult classes.

When asked how their friends or other classmates influenced their participation in class half of the participants reported that their peers distracted them so that they couldn't focus. Destiny said that it was bad when students were clowning and "the teacher just sits

there at the desk and don't do nothing about it". Fred said, "class clowns throw you off", Bernard, Abby and Nicole did admit, "I get distracted real easily". In a similar vein Gary struggled between playing with his friends and doing his work.

When asked whether or not they belonged at school, nine of the interviewed students felt not only did they belong here, they liked the school and they wanted to learn. Nicole was the only student who did not answer with an overwhelming positive answer stating, "I just come; I never thought about that, I don't know".

When asked about their favorite activity in school, students reported sports as their number one, followed by performing arts and then vocational organizations. They were evenly split when asked whether or not their peers influenced their extracurricular activities.

When asked whether or not they saw a connection between what they are learning in school and what they may be doing in the future, six felt they did not.

Gary summed up the general feelings, "None besides like I got Money Management so that teaches you how to count your money and use decimals and percents like in sales, but other than that, maybe computer class because the world is becoming technology-wise and everything is becoming computer controlled and maybe that is a good class, but other than that ...like history, that is something that you don't know nothing about, ya know? It happened before so if we don't get it, you don't need to penalize us because we don't get it or we don't get it. It is not really relevant to what we doing". Destiny and Fred believed their vocational classes would help them in the future.

Sub Question #3:

What conditions do at risk students feel are in their personalities that affect their academic success?

When asked how their teachers treated them, students had a lot to say. Half of the students cited teachers who showed favoritism and had bad attitudes. Some said they understood that some times teachers have a bad day and they didn't take it personally however; some of the interactions did seem personal. Destiny said, "you know you think they goin through something ...sometimes they ...take out for other kids messin' up and bein' bad, they will take it out on you". Saye cited a problem with a teacher who "don't like you period...and she don't like my brother for not like nothing in the world". She continued stating, "the majority of the teachers, they cool, they tryin' to get you out of school when other teachers, they know how long you been here and tryin' to hold you back and it's like I be doin my hardest, but I feel like it's da teacher". Nicole offered, "some of em show, favoritism on this hand....okay, well you just here and so I don't care if you do come to school or if you don't. I mean that's not their job to care". There were some who stated their teachers treated them very well and with respect.

When students were asked what kind of a relationship they wanted with their teachers, nine stated they wanted a good relationship. Nicole was the only student who said she didn't really care because she was going to do what she needed to do regardless. Students wanted their teachers to talk to them and value their opinion. Destiny also wanted the good relationship to include being a partner in learning. Saye extended that thought adding teachers should help students not only with learning issues but with other things as well, but with in limits. Saye also reminded us that it is "what more of us students need cause you don't know whether or not they getting it at home".



Interviewed students wanted teachers who listened to their opinion. Abby said, “you can tell that a teacher cares about your education”. She would like to have smaller class sizes so that teachers could have more time with each student. Fred and Gary also believed a teacher who listens to them shows that they care. Tracy told of a certain teacher who listened to her opinion, influenced her to work harder and to do more work. When asked if having a teacher listening to them was important, 100% responded yes.

Interviewed students were asked how they participated in decisions that matter to their education. Eight cited only choosing their classes yearly, and two said they tried but their mother or the guidance counselor did it. Nicole said, “when I do pick my classes, I don’t never get in them or I get taken out of them or something of that nature “. Many of the students cited going to the guidance counselor to get classes changed so that they did not have to be in a certain teacher’s class. Gary said he got his classes changed “with a new teacher that I have never had, ya know...so I can just start off fresh”. Tracy spoke of negative “vibes” in some classes and classrooms with students that kept her from concentrating.

The students in this interview agreed that being listened to was important to them. Abby said she did “a lot better in their classes and I understand them a lot better than the teachers that just don’t care...it is very important when you can tell that a teacher cares about your education”. Bernard liked to believe his teachers understood him stating, “so that make us have good contact”. Fred said it showed him that they really cared which created a sense of comfort for him. Tracy spoke of one teacher who listened to her. Tracy responded that she “did... a lot of my work in her class and she is like so what can I do more to help me with my work or whatever. She listens to you.” Adakiss continued by

adding, “some people want to get stuff off their mind and some teachers just don’t want to listen...they ought to just listen to use and see what we got to say.”

Despite the challenges all of the interviewed students face, nine stated they felt like they belonged at their school. Many students stated that they know they belonged at school and they wanted to make something of themselves. The remaining student stated, “I just come, I never thought about that, I don’t know”.

Only two interviewed students reported not having a mentor. Students cited relatives, parents, grandparents and siblings were the most often mentioned followed by teachers and coaches. Only Abby felt a mentor was not important to her, but she qualified that by stating, “I am not ready for one right now”. When asked about community activities that were helpful to them, participants generally only mentioned sports, with sixty percent stating they were not involved in any activities in the community.

The overarching research question in this study was “What conditions do at risk high school students identify as critical to their success?” Students best summarized it when they responded to the question about what their ideal school would look like. Six would like a more flexible schedule, not only classes beginning later but more time in between classes so they won’t feel so rushed. Fred would like classes to be offered more “like college work”. Seven of the participants mentioned wanting more technical classes or job training. Fred also added, “Have a workshop in the school where you build wood ...and you’d get paid”. They also mentioned having classes they needed for the real world. Nicole said, “driver’s ed so I could get my license quicker...some of these students don’t know, so I would have a sex ed class”. Nicole added that she wanted “a good school like where people can learn and really like give students a real reason to

come to school”. A couple of students mentioned removing students who played or were in gangs. Adakiss said, “if we get the gangs out...you would have more security”. Chris wanted more hands on work as well as experiments. Fred wanted the school to be cleaner “cause you can learn better if it is clean around you”. Saye wanted more personal responsibility stating, “Us seniors, it’s our last year and we (are) fixing to go out there to the real world...kids that haven’t experienced it yet”.

#### **IV.E. Summary of Findings**

There were three main themes or factors that students returned to during the interviews and they are evident in the results: Many mentioned that they wanted to get the gangs out of the schools, along with students who waste their time playing. They wanted teachers that respected them and acted as partners in their learning with more hands on activities as well as more time to master the material. They wanted some of the general school rules changed such as the dress code and a longer time between classes. The majority of students cited the need for classes that train them for their future career and life on their own. They said they need schools to offer a more flexible schedule. Many of the students also had difficulty attending school during traditional school hours. The interviews three main themes were: Discipline, Relationships and Curriculum.

In the area of discipline, students wanted the freedom to learn without distractions from other students that kept them from learning. They wanted those disruptive students to receive more supervision from teachers or administrators. They also discussed being treated with respect when they were being corrected.

The theme of relationships contained what they wanted from their teachers and other adults. Students wanted their teachers to care about them and to listen to their opinions.

They wanted their teachers to act as partners in learning. They wanted their individual educational needs to be considered in the methods used to teach the material. Finally, they wanted mentors. They realized the need for guidance from an adult mentor, whether family, teacher or other.

Students have many ideas in the area of what they wanted from the curriculum. Their biggest concern was that they wanted courses to address their needs for their futures. They were stuck in between the need to be in school and outside responsibilities so they wanted flexible scheduling for both the school times and class times. In the desire to be prepared for their future they wanted more technical, apprentice or job training classes. They recognized the need to master the curriculum so they wanted more time to gain that mastery. And in the same vein, they wanted the material they need to master to be presented in a style that suited their learning.

## **V. Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **V.A. Summary**

Since the seminal work detailing academic problems areas in the US, *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), a large body of research has been conducted to identify at risk student traits and the interventions that might improve a student's performance. However, these studies have tended to focus on the needs of schools relative to students and the interventions tend to reflect the factory style system currently in operation. In addition, when students were interviewed, the students were usually out of secondary school (drop-outs or graduates). Furthermore, they were not often encouraged to discuss their needs from their perspective.

In an effort to develop a method to determine needs of currently enrolled struggling at risk students, an interview method was developed and implemented to find out the needs of at risk students in an urban high school. At risk students were identified and questioned to determine the factors they felt were most critical to their success. Ten high school students were interviewed and their responses examined for trends and themes. These trends and themes together encompassed important areas where critical success conditions exist.

The most significant findings resulting from individual interview question answers of struggling at risk students can be broken down into three main themes: Discipline, Curriculum and Relationships.

The most significant discipline issue students cited was that they wanted more supervision for students who keep others from learning. They also discussed wanting respectful treatment from the principals and teachers who were correcting them.

Relationship concerns included wanting teachers who both listened to them, cared about them and were partners in learning. Students also wanted an adult mentor, whether family, teachers, coaches, or other concerned adults.

Students cited many curriculum issues that were critical to their success. Students wanted courses to address their future needs. Those courses should contain classes that teach real world skills, and ones that will train them in a technical skill or career. Time was an important factor. They wanted more flexible scheduling for school attendance and class attendance as well as more time to master the subject content. Students also wanted more hands on learning or other presentations suited to their learning styles.

#### **V.B. Analysis of Findings**

This study identified a number of individual conditions that may be critical to at risk student success which has been shown below.

- 1) a large proportion of parents were not highly involved in their child's education
- 2) all students liked the idea of an apprenticeship
- 3) students wanted teachers who listen to them
- 4) students considered a mentor important
- 5) students would advise staff to provide more supervision
- 6) students were interested in a different selection of classes
- 7) students needed more time to successfully complete work

Some questions and their responses were coupled to find interactions or correlations that might be meaningful. Some significant connections determined were:

- 1) low to moderate parental involvement may be related to:
  - a) inability to see real world preparation in school

- b) high potential to fight and be absent
  - c) more likely to be random in decision-making
  - d) greater need for teacher influence and mentors
  - e) think school principals and teachers were disrespectful
- 2) students who learned best visually or by example may be related to:
- a) need for teachers who listen to them
  - b) want greater subject choices
  - c) still saw no real world preparation
- 3) students influenced by teachers may be related to:
- a) learned best by example or hands on
  - b) low parental involvement
  - c) still made random education decisions

These correlations demonstrate the multifaceted aspects of these students. Yet, all the conditions and connections noted above can be combined into three overall factors that students, themselves, viewed as important to their success:

1. Discipline- Students wanted more supervision for students who kept others from learning and they wanted to be treated respectfully when corrected.
2. Relationships- Students wanted caring teachers who listened and acted as learning partners. Students wanted mentors who can be family members, teachers, coaches or other caring adults.
3. Curriculum- Students wanted courses that addressed their futures. They wanted more courses that taught life skills, technical skills, job training or apprenticeships. Students wanted more time to master subject matter, more flexible scheduling for

school times and class times. Students also wanted presentations to suit their learning styles, including hands on experiences.

## **V.C. Discussion**

Deschamps (1992) determined that at risk characteristics fit into one of five categories: demographic factors (including social and family), school related factors, personality factors, factors relating to early transition into adulthood, and factors relating to deviant behavior. These were similar to the three at risk characteristic sub-groups investigated here: life, school and personality environment.

### **V.C.1. Demographic (life effects)**

Parents were usually responsible for the quality of life that children experienced. It was probably not a surprise that the students with the most discipline issues and who felt directionless in school had low parental involvement in their education. O'Sullivan & Russell (2006) stated that there was a "blame cycle" with professionals and parents colliding over the responsibility of a student's success. According to student responses in this study, students with low self-esteem, academic problem issues and little sense of direction seemed to come from households with lower levels of parental involvement. Seven out of the ten interviewed students indicated less than high parental involvement. In fact, Fred, Gary and Tracy had multiple at risk characteristics (fighting, suspensions, absenteeism, and failure). They also indicated low or medium parental involvement. Saye and Chris stated that their parents had not been involved in their education for years.

Students with low parental involvement also tended to make unsound, random decisions regarding their education. A majority of the students did not have much parental involvement in their education and they were also not logical in making



education decisions (stay in school, class choice, and career path). Interestingly, they seemed to recognize that a lack of parental involvement was detrimental because they overwhelmingly asked for mentoring regardless of the adult source.

### **V.C.2. School effects**

Traditional, factory-style education did not provide for needs as determined by at risk students. In fact, time and money tended to be spent on students who were not at risk (Tsoi, 2004; Howard, 2003; Hein, 2004). This theme was echoed by at risk students in this study. Seven out of ten participants requested more time to perform class work, needed teachers to listen to their needs and requests, and had a greater need for influence from principals and teachers to guide their education decisions. Most of the students with low parental involvement were highly influenced by teachers. Many also felt teachers listened to them and they liked that relationship.

In addition to mentors, apprentice style training and broader class subjects were indicated as needed. Incidentally, six out of ten students in this study claimed no one asked about their learning needs and all ten wanted apprentice-training.

### **V.C.3. Personality effects**

Connections to the school, a welcoming classroom, and strong relationships with teachers as well as a sense of relevance in the curriculum were some of the factors that contributed to a positive student motivation to learn (Culligan, 2002; Yamauchi, 2003; Fortin, et al., 2006). The participants themselves stated that they appreciated a teacher that cared about their learning needs. One of the students commented that the students could tell when a teacher cared about them. Most of them also sought more interactions with teachers who listened to them, perhaps another form of mentoring. For example,

Abby said, “it is very important when you can tell that a teacher cares about your education”. Students recognized caring and felt respected by those teachers. Respect for students should be given unconditionally, and teachers needed to model respect with other teachers and adults (Cassidy & Bates, 2005).

Recent studies often indicated that the curriculum did not meet the modern needs of the student further reducing motivation due to lack of relevancy (Van Duzer, 2006; Quinn, et al., 2006). Many of the students, who claimed to learn best visually or by hands on, saw no real world preparation in school. At the same time, eight out of ten wanted greater subject choice. Marks (2006) found cognitive ability, which may be fully utilized by recognizing learning style, was the largest predictor of student performance, even greater than socioeconomic factors in his study that included 30 countries. Accordingly six out of ten participants asked for more material preparation time. Nine out of ten participants wanted a combination of more time and greater subject matter choices. .

Researchers have also found students’ ability can affect motivation which further affects performance (Sikes, 2002; Lan & Lanthier, 2003; Fortin, et al., 2006; Anderson & Keith, 1997). In fact, student motivation was one of the at risk factors most commonly cited by researchers (Sikes, 2002; Lan & Lanthier, 2003; Culligan, 2002; Broussard, et al., 2006). Interestingly, four out of the ten at risk students in this study could see school as a connection to the future and it was these students that were self-motivated to come to school. The remainder wanted more courses where they could see a connection to the future.

At risk students were multifaceted, yet they had specific opinions about their needs. They wanted an education presented in a manner in which they can learn and that has

relevance to their futures and they wanted strong respectful relationships with their teachers or other adults.

### **V.D. Conclusions**

The overall conclusions based on the student's responses to the question, "what conditions do at risk high school students identify as critical to their success," can be summed up very simply in three ways: Discipline, Relationships and Curriculum.

Students were concerned about discipline. They wanted the opportunity to learn in a safe environment. Students wanted teachers and principals to supervise students who were keeping other students from learning. They wanted teachers to remove class clowns and have better management over disruptive students. Students wanted gangs to be removed from the school; they felt it would improve the learning environment. Students felt they should be treated with respect from teachers and principals when they were being corrected. They wanted to have the opportunity to give their side of a story without being humiliated. They wanted to be respected. This concept ties in with the next category of stated needs-relationships.

Relationships were a key component in regard to student success. Students wanted to feel valued by others. They wanted their teachers and principals to listen to their opinions and show them care and respect. They wanted adult mentors to guide them. Many students made decisions in a random manner and they recognized that fact. They wanted someone who cared about them to guide them. They sought that relationship with family members, teachers, principals, coaches or adults in the community. Students wanted their teachers to be learning partners with them, guiding them but letting them gain responsibility in making educational decisions.

Students were also concerned about their future. They wanted a curriculum that would help them reach their future goals. They wanted classes that taught them life skills, technical skills, job training and apprenticeships. When they left school they wanted to be prepared to either continue their education or have a career. Students also worried about time. They wanted to arrive and leave school in their time frame, adapted to suit their needs. Having time between classes was important so they could have time to prepare for the next class. Time was also important to them when it came to learning subject material. They wanted extra time to master the material when needed. When it came to mastering the subject material they also wanted a presentation that suited their learning styles. The implications of these conclusions on at risk students needs and factors that reduce at risk status are discussed in the next chapter.

### **V.E. Implications**

At risk students in this study tended to confirm findings provided in other studies. Participants had deficits, often resulting from home lives that were un-met in the school setting. It was not unusual that schools and teachers were lacking in their ability to educate at risk students since school curricula and education systems were focused on the majority of students who may not be at risk (O'Sullivan & Russell, 2006; Hein, 2004; Howard, 2003; Tsoi, 2004; Tarleton, 1992). The at risk students sensed this phenomena and asked for more teacher involvement. Coincidentally, they also asked for more supervision in school which might imply more discipline of students and in classrooms, more time at individual instruction and more time for general interactions with teachers and staff.

More involvement of teachers and principals might provide the mentoring supplement that helps at risk students succeed in school. Even better, a number of education mentor training programs that brought teachers and parents together have been implemented with some success at reducing at risk factors such as fighting, absenteeism, low grades, etc, (Fleming, 2005; Reid, 2005; Brown, 1999; Brendtro & Longhurst, 2005). This may be an opportunity to use teachers in a greater mentoring capacity, though responsibility levels were already high. Interestingly, O'Sullivan & Russell (2006) believe that schools may be able to increase positive parental involvement using teachers. As part of a solution, parenting and behavior management classes could be offered as well as an effort by the school to reach out to parents to find common goals and to create an environment of cooperation with all celebrating achievements and to strengthen the school/home connection. Community was another component that could be added, to aid in the search for mentors and for parental training. Local churches, business, colleges/universities, clubs and community service organizations can be called upon to contribute to what will ultimately consist of students who will be their future members.

Since most of the interviewed students indicated they started having problems in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, this might be an appropriate time to implement training for all parents. Specialized training to provide students with the mental tools necessary to avoid at risk behaviors (fighting, etc.) might also be initiated at this time. Interestingly, other studies showed at risk behavior starting to manifest in the 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> grade, presumably due to physical and environmental changes (Reich, 2004; Sikes, 2002). The parents or responsible adults of students who continued to show at risk behaviors in subsequent school years might participate in training on an annual basis designed to help them direct and guide their

children's progress in school. This time may also be the time to teach students how to be resilient. Steven Covey's *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, is one resource that can be used to teach students methods to build resiliency. Building resiliency could be one of the topics taught to both teachers and parents, so they may teach by example. Brooks & Goldstein (2003, p. 152), reminded us that the "basic ingredient in nurturing hope and resilience in our children is the presence of at least one adult who communicates to a child, through words and actions, I believe in you and I will stand by you". They also reminded us of "the power of one adult to change the life of a child must never be underestimated". A teacher has that power, to reach, teach and empower students. Siebert (2005) told us resiliency can be taught and learned at any age and it was a necessary attribute in a world that is becoming more and more turbulent. When people live and work in an environment that requires constant adaptation to new technology, new methods, and procedures, resiliency was the factor that helped them thrive. The school system has needed to recognize that the world is full of continual change and teach our students the ability to adapt to those changes, thus preparing them for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Students were concerned about time: school attendance times, class times, transition times and time to master the material. Researchers found that children who faced more challenges at home took longer to learn (Van Duzer, 2006; Sikes, 2002). Schools were still locked in a system that required students to fit into a one-size fits all structure. At risk students needed to have flexibility that allowed them the time they needed to master the curriculum they need to succeed. Within that framework they needed to have the material differentiated to meet their learning styles, again, so they can master the

curriculum. They also needed to have flexible school and class schedules that can adapt to the challenges they face within and outside of the school setting.

According to the at risk students, apprenticeship programs were highly desired. All of the respondents wanted one. Increasingly, students were encouraged to go to college, but other career options may need to be promoted to help these at risk students find focus and put them on a career path which will lead them in their futures to a higher education. For example, Fred and Destiny saw high-value in vocational classes. Gary summarized the general feelings of the group by saying, “more real-world classes like money management or computers are needed,” with less emphasis on classes needed only to go college. Students also wanted increased mentoring and sought greater supportive teacher interactions. Reich’s (2004) qualitative study on a youth apprenticeship program found students were empowered by supportive relationships with others, educational experiences in school and post-secondary, career empowerment and self-empowerment. At risk students strongly desired apprenticeship type programs and greater connections with teachers as they sense a connection to their future through such programs and interactions.

#### **V.F. Recommendations**

Several recommendations have resulted from this study. At risk students were multifaceted requiring specialized interventions/programs designed to meet their individual issues. To this means, at risk students could be interviewed to ascertain the most significant factors important to their success. Some of this information could be used to develop an individual learning plan. This would allow teachers to differentiate lessons to suit student learning styles. It will give administrators information regarding

class scheduling and the types of course to offer. It will also supply information concerning the types of staff development needed to help teachers reach their students. Staff development should include cultural awareness, student/teacher relationships, mentoring, classroom management, learning styles and differentiation. Training classes should also include teaching and modeling resiliency. Resiliency classes could also be offered to parents and others who mentor students. Classes to teach parents/mentors of at risk students how they can help foster success in their child by stressing the importance of disciplined study, school attendance, and resolving anger issues without violence. This may also be an opportunity to teach parents other skills they may need to meet the challenges they face in parenting at risk students.

If outright apprenticeship programs are difficult to implement, then there may be other options that could act as transitional programs to apprenticeships. Extracurricular activities that promote skills in trades, computer systems, business development, entrepreneurship and money management might provide students with the inspiration to perform in school and develop skills they view as real-world. Where possible, classrooms should be encouraged to provide as much hands-on learning as possible with real world examples. In science lab-based classes this has already occurred to some extent. But, classes in math, history, social studies and economics might also be more amenable to this process especially since at risk students showed a propensity to learn by visual processes and specific hands-on examples. Finally, the community can be used to help meet student needs by supplying extracurricular activities that serve to train students in needed skills.



Special programs, even a special school, might be considered that challenges at risks students: a school that helps at risk students advance into a career of their desire, not bound by traditional expectations. A school that would be flexible and designed to meet the needs of individual students, not one that makes students fit into the needs of the school.

Based on student responses an ideal school would have the following features:

- a. Flexible scheduling that allows students to sign up for classes at their desired time frame
- b. Classes paced and taught to fit their learning styles
- c. Courses that include life skills
- d. Courses to train students to meet their career or vocational paths
- e. Apprentice training opportunities
- f. Mentoring for each student
- g. Teachers trained to counsel at risk student

#### **V.G. Dissemination**

The findings of this study will be disseminated by three methods:

- 1) Finding can be shared via presentation with other education professionals in the school district to help identify at risk students and be considerate of their needs.
- 2) Findings can be used to develop funding proposals designed to further develop programs that assist at risk students, keeping them in school (a school district benefit) and helping them achieve “real-world” visible career goals.
- 3) Findings can be used for the development of the philosophical foundation of a special school designed to help at risk students succeed in a viable career

opportunity path, even college.

The hope is that the number of students considered at risk will be drastically reduced. This means greater attendance in a school district and fewer disciplinary issues requiring school resources. In some cases, a student will always be considered at risk but, hopefully, enough of a foundation for resiliency can be developed to help them succeed in adult life.

### **V.H. Concluding Thoughts**

This researcher is a teacher and special education professional who has worked with at risk students for nearly a decade. These children have value and the potential to contribute to our society like anyone else. However, school systems have been large factory-style bureaucracies that often overlooked these children as their needs are greater than the average. Their voices deserve to be heard and their needs responded to such that they can participate in and contribute to society, and have an equal opportunity in the pursuit of happiness. A democratic society is one in which its members are valued team members that have the opportunity to enjoy a happy, productive and successful life.

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## **Appendices**

### **APPENDIX A: Permission to conduct the study for the superintendent**

Dear Dr. Bedden,

I am currently enrolled in the educational leadership doctoral program at Georgia Southern University. My study concerns at risk high school students. At risk students have been studied by their demographics, by their schools characteristics and by their personality characteristics. The result was the implementation of interventions and programs designed to address the identified deficits. Researchers have surveyed students after they have dropped out and at risk students who are succeeding but they have yet to interview struggling at risk students. At risk student voices have not been heard by researchers. The purpose of this study is to give struggling at risk students a voice to find out the factors that they identify as critical to their success, thus informing the literature and adding to the base of knowledge. It is hoped that this study will facilitate decisions and policies that affect these students.

I solicit your permission to use your students for this study. I intend to interview 10 at-risk students in-depth, with the signed permission of their guardians. The interviews will take place off campus so instructional time will not be interrupted. The students will receive a pseudonym to protect their privacy. The interviews will be tape recorded and stored in a safe location. The transcribed interviews will be given to the student for review, corrections being made as needed. Upon completion of the study all tapes will be destroyed.

Please feel free to contact me at (803-663-6680) if you have any questions. If approved, please forward written permission to me on your letterhead. I will interview students

upon approval from the dissertation committee, the IRB, the principal, the parent or guardian and you.

Sincerely,

Catherine Nigg

Butler High School Teacher

## **APPENDIX B: Permission to conduct the study for the principal**

Dear Dr. Reeves,

I am currently enrolled in the educational leadership doctoral program at Georgia Southern University. My study concerns at risk high school students. At risk students have been studied by their demographics, by their schools characteristics and by their personality characteristics. The result was the implementation of interventions and programs designed to address the identified deficits. Researchers have surveyed students after they have dropped out and at risk students who are succeeding but they have yet to interview struggling at risk students. At risk student voices have not been heard by researchers. The purpose of this study is to give struggling at risk students a voice to find out the factors that they identify as critical to their success, thus informing the literature and adding to the base of knowledge. It is hoped that this study will facilitate decisions and policies that affect these students.

I solicit your permission to use your students for this study. I intend to interview 10 at-risk students in-depth, with the signed permission of their guardians. The interviews will take place off campus so instructional time will not be interrupted. The students will receive a pseudonym to protect their privacy. The interviews will be tape recorded and stored in a safe location. The transcribed interviews will be given to the student for review, corrections being made as needed. Upon completion of the study all tapes will be destroyed.

Please feel free to contact me at (803-663-6680) if you have any questions. If approved, please forward written permission to me on your letterhead. I will interview students

upon approval from the dissertation committee, the IRB, the superintendent, the parent or guardian and you.

Sincerely,

Catherine Nigg

Butler High School Teacher

## **APPENDIX C: Consent for interview**

### **CONSENT FORM**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate in a research study titled “Understanding Factors Leading to High School Success as Identified by At Risk Students” conducted by Catherine Nigg in the Educational Leadership Program at Georgia Southern University, under the direction of Dr. Meta Harris. I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can stop taking part without giving any reason, and without penalty. I can ask to have all of the information about me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed. The reason for this study is to gather information and perceptions about factors that lead to success as identified by at risk high school students.

I will not benefit from this research. However, my participation may lead to information that could benefit future educational decisions. If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to do the following: answer questions on tape about my factors that will lead to success in high school and to read and approve the transcript of the interview. All my information will be kept confidential and will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study.

No risk nor discomfort is anticipated and as a research participant I may withdraw from the interview at any time. All information concerning me will be kept confidential unless required by law. If information about me is published, it will be written in a way that I cannot be recognized. The only persons who will know that I am a research participant will be me and the research investigator.

I will be assigned an identifying pseudonym. The identifying pseudonym will be used on all audiotapes and transcripts. The pseudonym will be used in the research paper. I understand that the audiotapes and transcripts will be kept only by the research investigator in a lock file cabinet in the researcher's home and that all audiotapes will be destroyed by the researcher at the conclusion of the study. By my initial, I agree to allow the researcher to audiotape my voice during the interview session. \_\_\_\_\_ Initials of research participant.

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am agreeing by my signature to allow my child/ward to take part in this research and understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my records.

Catherine Nigg

_____		
Name of Research Investigator	Signature	Date
_____	_____	_____
Name of Legal guardian of participant	Signature	Date
_____	_____	_____
Name of participant	Signature	Date
_____	_____	_____

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

## APPENDIX D: Raw findings (interviewee responses)

Table D.1. contains the raw responses of students to interview questions relevant to sub-question 1 of this study: What conditions do at risk students feel are in their lives that affect their academic success?

**Table D.1.** Sub-question 1 questions and answers.

Question	Research	Research Question
<p><b>What do your parents say about your grades?</b></p> <p><b>Abby:</b> They think that they could be better.</p> <p><b>Adakiss:</b> They love ‘em.</p> <p><b>Bernard:</b> Well, like when I have like some kind of low grades she is like she is kinda like if you need any help, tell her and she will kind of help me out to pull that grade up like if I have a D or F or have about 69 average, she will like in the free time that she has, she will help me during that time.</p> <p><b>Gary:</b> They are average. They could be better.</p> <p><b>Chris:</b> My mom says I could do better. That’s all she say, then she closes the door.</p> <p><b>Destiny:</b> They feel I can do a lot better, more studying, more taking time out and staying after school. (Grades) Ranging from some classes A’s, most of the easy classes are higher grades than mainly just my real classes like social studies and English.</p> <p><b>Fred:</b> Uh, they say that they are good except for the bad ones, like D’s and F’s, I have to improve and they take my radio and most things that I like best. they take things that I like the most, like if I have a D or a F. But A,B,C is allowed in my house.</p> <p><b>Nicole:</b> Basically, all they tell me is that I could do better</p>	Anderson & Keith, Barton, O’Sullivan & Russell	Sub 1



<p>and that I should pull them up because a college isn't going to want somebody who makes D's and F's on their report cards all the time.</p> <p><b>Saye:</b> To be honest with you, my parents have not seen my grades since 5<sup>th</sup> grade, but my sister, she is like basically the person that look at my grades, but I really have improved over the years, so they really don't have much to say about it but the good work.</p> <p><b>Tracy:</b> To my good classes, mom says good but in my bad classes, she say I never made like lower than a 63 or something and she says I need to strive harder to do that.</p>		
<p><b>What influences your grades the most?</b></p> <p><b>Abby:</b> The way the teacher teaches. Uhm, whenever they go over things out loud and on the board and hands on stuff.</p> <p><b>Adakiss:</b> I say, my parents when they help me in some of my work and basically, my parents.</p> <p><b>Bernard:</b> Uhm, I would say people in the classroom. The students, friends and all that like interrupt me and kind of keep me on track. Bad behavior</p> <p><b>Gary:</b> Influences wise- me- like friends? Uhm, when you get grades, you wanna keep getting them.</p> <p><b>Chris:</b> Well, who helped me strive to get good grades was my grandma. But, if still picture her in my head, I think that will influence me well.</p> <p><b>Destiny:</b> The teacher helps more when they break down your work and you know what I'm sayin, really explain how they gonna grade it and what they lookin for and how the testing go.</p> <p><b>Fred:</b> Uh, the teachers.</p> <p><b>Nicole:</b> I mean, I mean they (parents) try to make me get better grades but sometimes, I just like okay well, I don't</p>	<p>Anderson &amp; Keith, Barton</p>	<p>Sub 1</p>

<p>care, so I try.</p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> What makes you care? <b>Nicole:</b> My grandma.</p> <p><b>Saye:</b> Uhm, I don't know what influences my grades.....</p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> Why do you want to get good ones?</p> <p><b>Saye:</b> So I can have a great GPA.....that's the only thing. So I can get accepted in some colleges. I am not looking for a specific college, I just want to get accepted in at least two or three, maybe.</p> <p><b>Tracy:</b> My sisters. My friends sometimes.</p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> They help you do better or worse? <b>Tracy:</b> Better. <b>Interviewer:</b> Better? Good. They try to encourage you to do good? So you have a close knit group of friends and family?</p> <p><b>Tracy:</b> Yeah, my sister teaches school and so she helps me do my work lessons out.</p>		
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Table D.2. contains the raw responses of students to interview questions relevant to sub-question 2 of this study: What conditions do at risk students feel are in the school environment that affects their academic success?

**Table D.2.** Sub-question 2 questions and answers.

<p><b>Do you feel you have enough time to prepare for material before you are tested?</b></p> <p><b>Abby:</b> Uhm, it depends on what type of, like the sections are and if they are longer or whatever</p> <p><b>Gary:</b> No. Longer. Cause it's just not like you say, you sick two days out of the week and then there is only three days left and then you got to take the test right on Friday that is something you just learnt when you came back to school.</p> <p><b>Adakiss:</b> I have enough time.</p>	<p>Van Duzer, Sikes, Quinn</p>	<p>Sub 2</p>
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<p><b>Bernard:</b> Yeah, I have enough time. I try to make myself have enough time even though I don't have a lot of time; so the things that I do, I have to putting something aside and it's like a couple minutes just to do that.</p> <p><b>Chris:</b> I don't think, that with a note cause I work too much. I have two outside jobs.</p> <p><b>Destiny:</b> Yes, we take time and we even do study guides, but sometimes some teachers just give you a test and mainly half the information on there, you didn't even go over.</p> <p><b>Fred:</b> Uhm, Uhm.....no. Yes, lots more time. Yeah, it's like they you jump from one thing and go to the next, like Chapter 1 and then next week you are on Chapter 2 before you even know it. You don't even know the rest of Chapter 1.</p> <p><b>Nicole:</b> Not really. No, because sometimes they could go over stuff and then I still wouldn't get and the next thing we know we got a test and I just... I fail it or I just don't do it at all.</p> <p><b>Saye:</b> It depends, it depends on I don't know, I guess when like when the teacher has you go over stuff, if it's just like a pop quiz or somethin, uh, I don't know. Uh, huh I been done failed (laughs)</p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> So you need more time to study?</p> <p><b>Saye:</b> Uh, hum.</p> <p><b>Tracy:</b> No cause we got three classes like math, Spanish and literature and we only get two days and I think we should get at least a week.</p>		
<p><b>How do you learn best?</b></p> <p><b>Abby:</b> Uhm, whenever they go over things out loud and on the <b>Adakiss:</b> Well, basically, reading a book. It's the way everybody else does, take a book and read it.</p>	<p>Van Duzer, Sikes, Quinn</p>	<p>Sub 2</p>

<p>board and hands on stuff.</p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> You like to read?</p> <p><b>Adakiss:</b> Yeah, you learn more.</p> <p><b>Bernard:</b> Whenever I learn how to learn best, like if a teacher like she is teaching the class to everybody, right? But, I am like the only one that doesn't get it that much, it's like going through it, it's like we have a problem in fractions or something like that, it's just explained to me specifically so I can understand it. Step by step kind.</p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> So, if you had more time to learn, do you think you would do better in school?</p> <p><b>Gary:</b> Yeah. Like when we have a hands-on project and everybody is working together and everybody is focusing on that one thing and the energy is good, Yeah good energy, like a good day when everybody is having fun and learning together, that is the best day, ya know? That is the best day of school.</p> <p><b>Chris:</b> To be honest with you, it's like, I got to see it for myself. Like reading a book, that's not gonna help. Teachers talking about it, that just takes me to sleep. Examples like if they show it or demonstrate it, I could learn better like that.</p> <p><b>Destiny:</b> By listening and when teachers instead of just givin you work, just to do it or just give you somethin to look over, just when they teach you they lecture about the information and it's just nothin, you just sit down and you just talk about the information instead of just doin work about it and just from listening.</p> <p><b>Fred:</b> Uh, when I am alone and I got a little music playin, it gets me goin. I love to read.</p> <p><b>Nicole:</b> By writing, by writing it down and then when I write and talk as I go along.</p>		
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<p><b>Saye:</b> I learn best uhm, you mean in my alone time or when I am with a group.....I like group work, yeah I learn more group work then I do good by myself, but it don't matter, but I do best in the group so, yes.</p> <p><b>Tracy:</b> Hands on.</p>		
<p><b>How do your friends or other classmates influence your participation in class?</b></p> <p><b>Abby:</b> I think it affects me in a big way because when my friends aren't doing anything and whenever they are acting a certain way, I can't focus on the stuff that I need to focus on.</p> <p><b>Adakiss:</b> I participate, but they don't. So, I really don't have no problem with participation. I mean they might lag off a little bit, but I stay on task.</p> <p><b>Bernard:</b> Well, by talking about other things like I did this at this party and all the time thinking like that.</p> <p><b>Gary:</b> When it's bad, it could be bad like when your friend don't want to do that work, but I will still do my work ya know, I don't have to do what they do</p> <p><b>Chris:</b> To be honest with you, some of them don't. They just clown, but I have some classmates that actually help me be stronger, influence me.</p> <p><b>Destiny:</b> They don't. (Off track students) is usually why we can't never get no work done cause everybody in the class playin and the teacher just sit at the desk and don't do nothin about it.</p> <p><b>Fred:</b> It depends. Mostly, they..help. And some of them are class clowns, they throw you off and so you gotta keep your distance away from 'em.</p> <p><b>Nicole:</b> I wish they could....they.....sometimes, it depends.....it really depends....like sometimes if I have....depends what that class is, I just sit there. They don't</p>	<p>Zvoch, Sikes, Lan &amp; Lanthier, Deschamps</p>	<p>Sub 2</p>

<p>do nothin and I hate to say it, then most the time, I won't do nothin, so, you know, I just sit there and talk and sometimes they talkin to me.....I get distracted real easily....so....</p> <p><b>Saye:</b> Well, a lot of my friends, well the majority of my friends, really don't influence me. It's only one girl that influences me the most and you know, she is just head on like at times, I don't want to go to school and she is you need to go to school and dah, dah, dah, you gotta pass. So, it's just that one friend. I think she had you in the last few years.</p> <p><b>Tracy:</b> Sometimes, not all the time.</p>		
<p><b>How might your participation differ in classes in which you are doing well as opposed to those in which your grades are lower?</b></p> <p><b>Adakiss:</b> Well. I try to do my best in every class. I try to stay on top.</p> <p><b>Bernard:</b> Well, when I am making a good grade and like I did everything and everything is completed, then I might get off task, but if I got a big problem in that class, I am willing to pay attention. I take the time to do what I got to do to get that grade.</p> <p><b>Gary:</b> I am ready to go to sleep. I don't wanna do it. I will give up easy and just go to sleep during the whole period until the bell rings.</p> <p><b>Chris:</b> The classes I am doing well in, the teachers, they actually teach. The classes I am doing bad in, the teachers like they barely teach it and then when we have a question, sometimes they don't want to answer the question.</p> <p><b>Destiny:</b> I try to work harder in classes that I am not doin good in. Cause that's the only way I can bring my grade up is if I work harder. The other classes that I am passing, they are much easier and I don't have to worry about doin anything.</p>	<p>Sikes, Lan, Fortin, Anderson, Barton, Broussard</p>	<p>Sub 2</p>

<p><b>Fred:</b> Uh, I would say, I work harder in classes I do good in. ...it just takes time, like I work hard, but I work more hard at home than school. On the classes that I do bad in, I work more hard at home cause you get way more time at home than at school.</p> <p><b>Nicole:</b> If I'm doin bad, okay if I'm doin good in class, I just sit there well okay, I'm not gonna do this cause I'm already doin good, so therefore, I don't need this grade, I could make a zero and still pass and dis and dat and then if I'm failin the class, den I just don't care....sometimes, I'm not gonna say I don't care, but sometimes I don't. It depends on what class it is.</p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> So, when you are doing bad, you give up?</p> <p><b>Nicole:</b> Uh, hum.</p> <p><b>Saye:</b> Uhm, participation.... (talking very softly)</p> <p>Uhm, to be honest with you, it's both. I work hard in both. I don't work as hard when I'm passing, but if I am failing a class, I work even harder. So, I try to keep my grades to a minimal passable grades maybe, but you know.</p> <p><b>Tracy:</b> Some stuff, I know. Other grades that we get, higher stuff here, like your class. I feel like your class is one of the classes I listen more, but in math, Mrs. _____throws me off because she is always negative. She is a negative teacher so it is not easy to learn in her class.</p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> Okay, so the teacher's attitude has a big influence on your participation? <b>Tracy:</b> Yes.</p>		
<p><b>What is the main thing that influences your classroom participation?</b></p> <p><b>Abby:</b> Uhm, if what we are talking about is interesting and if the class is participating.</p> <p><b>Adakiss:</b> Just goin on time and being prepared. Going to</p>	<p>Sikes, Lan, Fortin, Anderson, Barton</p>	<p>Sub 2</p>

<p>work.</p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> It sounds like you are pretty self-motivated. You want to make good grades?</p> <p><b>Adakiss:</b> Uh, huh.</p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> Why do you want to make good grades?</p> <p><b>Adakiss:</b> Uhm, everybody else, they want to drop out, but I mean I am staying in to win, to reach the lights.</p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> Do you want to graduate?</p> <p><b>Adakiss:</b> I want to graduate. I want to reach the lights.</p> <p><b>Gary:</b> My getting out of school really. I am so ready to be out of here, I want to do everything now like take the test and get it over with.</p> <p><b>Chris:</b> A good teacher that helps.</p> <p><b>Destiny:</b> Uhm, if I can stay awake and stay focused and when the teacher is talking instead of just like I said, other than her just givin us work.....</p> <p><b>Nicole:</b> Uhmhhhmm.....what makes me want to participate? I don't know, sometimes, I don't know, I guess if I don't have nobody to talk to, I just get bored just by sittin there so therefore, I just okay when the teacher asks me somethin well, I am going to read if she asks me to read and this and that.....so therefore, if I don't have anybody to talk to, I just do the class work.</p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> Ah, okay, so it works better if there is a smaller less..... distractive people? <b>Nicole:</b> Yeah.....</p> <p><b>Saye:</b> Yes, that's one. I was trying to think of another one. Uhm, I uh, nuh and it also depends on the teacher like how well the teacher is performin or what not cause I end up goin to sleep if they are boring, you know?</p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> So the teacher's attitude has a big influence on your participation? <b>Tracy:</b> Yes.</p>		
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<p><b>What connections do you see between what you are learning in your school subjects and what you may be doing in the future?</b></p> <p><b>Abby:</b> Not exactly.</p> <p><b>Adakiss:</b> Subjects. I mean you gotta have math in the world, I know that. Science too, biology. Basically science and biology are the same thing it is just learning about different wastes. <b>Interviewer:</b> What do you want to do when you graduate?</p> <p><b>Adakiss:</b> I want to go to college?</p> <p><b>Bernard:</b> Coaching. I see they got me in ____ cause I know that me and the future, I think I am going to be in a lot of energies like this and I could see myself in a lot of energies like this and writing a lot of papers. I see why they got the writing test for you to write completely. Like, if the energy was still like that so I understand them kind of things.</p> <p><b>Gary:</b> Not really none besides like I got Money Management so that teaches you how to count your money and use decimals and percents like in sales, but other than that, maybe computer class because the world is becoming technology-wise and everything is becoming computer controlled and maybe that is a good class, but other than that like history, that is something that you don't know nothing about, ya know? It happened before so if we don't get it, you don't need to penalize us because we don't get it or we don't get it. It is not really relevant to what we doin.</p> <p><b>Chris:</b> That basically what you learn in school, the methods that the teachers you, but basically it is like you listen to the teacher and follow directions....you gonna need that in the workforce, because if you don't get that now, you can't get it later; ain't nobody gonna be there to teach you.</p>	<p>Cassidy, Culligan</p>	<p>Sub 2</p>
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<p><b>Destiny:</b> Uhm, other than when I take cosmetology, that's all I want to do is do that and business wise, I am not taking a business class right now, but after math, I finished all my maths that help to, managing money cause I was in money management, but other than that nothin else.</p> <p><b>Fred:</b> Uh, I see carpentry. Math and construction because I feel like I want to try to be a woods person.</p> <p><b>Nicole:</b> Okay, well in the future, I want to become a nurse and I don't know.</p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> So, do your science classes help you?</p> <p><b>Nicole:</b> No, cause..... I'm not gonna say I'm failing, but I'm doin okay and in my science class we not talkin about nursing, we on the forensic stuff right now. Yeah, if you want to say that but uhmmm, I don't see how forensics is part of nursing. I mean I know it's got something to do with doctors, but I don't.....</p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> You don't see the connection? <b>Nicole:</b> No, I don't. Not out there.</p> <p><b>Saye:</b> Uhmmmm, not really, maybe Lit, but like with math, you really don't need all that all that extra stuff.....in my opinion you don't really need all that extra stuff when you go out into the real world like all the xy axis and hypotenuse, and all that, I feel as though you don't need all them crazies, you just need all the simple mathematics like you know, addition, subtraction, multiply and maybe a little bit of dividing and fractions that's the only thing that I feel as though I wouldn't need when I'm in the real world. Well, once I graduate, I wanna go to Augusta Tech or Savannah Tech to get my license for cosmetology. I want to do hair and maybe after that, I want to pursue a little bit of modeling. Dat's about the main two goals that I have been havin. That's</p>		
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<p>like my dreams.</p> <p><b>Tracy:</b> I want to be a lawyer.</p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> So, do you think that any of the classes you are now in are preparing you for that job?</p> <p><b>Tracy:</b> Not really, well my literature class does.</p>		
<p><b>How do your peers influence your extracurricular activities?</b></p> <p><b>Abby:</b> Yeah.</p> <p><b>Adakiss:</b> Some of my peers, I mean, it is not a day to day influence that they influence me, but I influence myself to do better. It is just my peers, they want to act like childish, but as a kid, like it is a kid's game. But me, basically, I am trying to influence them not to do bad and doing anything wrong.</p> <p><b>Chris:</b> Some, some helps out a little bit but at the same time now of days, you really got to chose who your friends are cause at sometimes they will back stab you in the back for no apparent reason.</p> <p><b>Destiny:</b> They don't. I was in the band for three years, but after that I just tried to get more focused on my work. I was a flag girl and a captain.</p> <p><b>Fred:</b> Uh, no ma'am.</p> <p><b>Nicole:</b> I don't do probably extracurricular activities.....</p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> What about ROTC?</p> <p><b>Nicole:</b> Yeah, I been doin that since the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. I used to go on the Drill Team and then my 10<sup>th</sup> grade year, my sister graduated from Butler, so, I didn't.....</p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> You didn't keep going? <b>Nicole:</b> No, I just dropped out my 10<sup>th</sup> grade year.</p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> So, you don't do anything of that?</p> <p><b>Nicole:</b> No, I don't. <b>Interviewer:</b> You aren't still in ROTC?</p> <p><b>Nicole:</b> I'm still in ROTC, but you know, well I go to parade</p>	<p>Broussard, Culligan, Barton, Brown</p>	<p>Sub 2</p>

and parade like one time this whole year and see last year I didn't do anything with ROTC at all.		
<p><b>Are there any activities in your community that help you?</b></p> <p><b>Abby:</b> Yeah, I think that would be a very good idea.</p> <p><b>Adakiss:</b> Uh, basically, let's see, swimming, playing basketball. That keeps me away from trouble because I just try to learn and go further and play football and soccer; all types of sports basically.</p> <p><b>Bernard:</b> Let's see, basically I see like football conditioning. I would rather go through that. So when I take football conditions, like when I go out on the field, I put my best effort into everything that I do.</p> <p><b>Gary:</b> Uh, no.</p> <p><b>Chris:</b> Uhm, really, I can't think of none. The only thing I do is work and that's it.</p> <p><b>Fred:</b> Nuh, uh, no ma'am.</p> <p><b>Nicole:</b> (hear her sighing)...not really.</p> <p><b>Saye:</b> No, not that I know of. No.</p> <p><b>Tracy:</b> My sister, like I said, she teaches some little kids around our neighborhood.</p>	Barton, Yamauchi	Sub 2
<p><b>How do you feel about apprentice training (job training)?</b></p> <p><b>Abby:</b> I think that would be wonderful cause that would get you better prepared for a job and stuff to look for in a job.</p> <p><b>Adakiss:</b> Yes. Yes ma'am. Uh, I could work in a restaurant or I can go out and do construction. I probably would like to cook, cut, probably be a busboy too.</p> <p><b>Bernard:</b> Oh yeah</p> <p><b>Gary:</b> I would love that cause it would be I am learning from them, ya know, experience. Somebody that had done it already. I am not saying that the teachers don't know what they are talking about, but if they know what they are talking</p>	Yamauchi, Barton	Sub 2

<p>about then they should be able to get there point across like that (snaps fingers) and make it fun too at the same time instead of just doing book work all the time.</p> <p><b>Chris:</b> I think schools really do need that. I wish some schools really taught that, it would help a lot. Yeah, I meant that, but at the same time it is like they teach you some stuff, but yet at the same time, they don't really teach you enough.</p> <p><b>Destiny:</b> Yes, I would like to do that.</p> <p><b>Fred:</b> I feel that's the best solution really.</p> <p><b>Nicole:</b> Oh, yeah..... I would go do that you know. I'm not gonna say it's money cause I like helpin people so, I want to be a nurse so you know sayin you gettin paid for it at the same time is like.....(candy)</p> <p><b>Saye:</b> Job training? Yes, yes, I feel as though it is especially if you want to own your own business or have your own business, that's why I am in marketing. I have marketing so I feel as so that play a big role in it or whatever, so and economics.</p> <p><b>Tracy:</b> That would be nice. My classes don't got that though.</p>		
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<p><b>How could school best prepare you for the real world?</b></p> <p><b>Abby:</b> Better programs to prepare you for college, stuff like that. Yeah, technical classes.</p> <p><b>Adakiss:</b> I say like some people have good talents, but they want to waste it but they don't do it like me. I like to cook, build. I mean I ain't wasting my time.</p> <p><b>Bernard:</b> Well, let's see....business classes.</p> <p><b>Gary:</b> Computer or robot animation or cartoons and drawing.</p>	<p>Culligan, Sheppard, Yamauchi</p>	<p>Sub 2, 3</p>
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<p><b>Interviewer:</b> What do you want to do when you get out of school?</p> <p><b>Gary:</b> I am stuck in between auto mechanic and computer programming.</p> <p><b>Chris:</b> Stop like, stop feeding junk and just feed the truth and say what's really out there and not selling like half-baked stuff. Cause like when I got out there, most of the stuff the teachers was teaching me wasn't true. I had to learn for myself. Like they say, just like this different stuff, it's really hard to explain, it's just hard.</p> <p><b>Destiny:</b> Other than just teaching you the basis of what you are trying to learn and information, just like manner wise and how to grow up and you know what I am sayin, you know how they treat students and stuff? You gotta learn that it is way different in how you talk to people and you know what I'm sayin and stuff like that.</p> <p><b>Fred:</b> Uh, I say if they just listen, like teacher-wise. If the teacher just listen sometimes to some things we have to say and you know what I'm sayin, don't just rush through things.</p> <p>College prep, oh yeah</p> <p><b>Nicole:</b> How could school prepare me for the real world? (softly, like she is asking herself) Nothin. I don't think nothin.</p> <p><b>Saye:</b> Uhm, yeah, yeah like in school now they have cosmetology in high school. A lot of people say that you know they want to pursue cosmetology that they take it during school, but once they get out there and actually get their license, they don't want to do it no more. So, I just, I don't know, it was kind of good that I didn't have cosmetology for two class periods cause I maybe get tired</p>		
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of it like everybody else did, so I'd rather just wait.		
<p><b>What are your favorite activities at school?</b></p> <p><b>Abby:</b> Chorus.</p> <p><b>Adakiss:</b> My favorite activities, I mean let's see, I like being in sports and stuff, lifting weights, basically, cooking, science. See cooking is like my metaphor, it just keeps me out of trouble and it just keeps me into different types of recipes that I can learn.</p> <p>Construction. I do a lot of construction on the whole. I just like to build dog houses and stuff. I just rebuilt my doghouse.</p> <p><b>Bernard:</b> At school, gym. I like sciences a little bit when we do labs and stuff like that.</p> <p><b>Gary:</b> What we do? One of my favorite activities in my Language Arts Class is we like put on plays every week or we will read a book and depending on how long it takes us to read that book, we will split up into groups and write like a storyline and creates our own story instead of what happened in the book....we can mix it up any kind of way</p> <p><b>Chris:</b> Going to football games, lunch, clowning sometimes and just hanging out with your true friends, the ones that got your back.</p> <p><b>Destiny:</b> Uhm, I don't have any, other than going to cosmetology and doin hair.</p> <p><b>Fred:</b> Uh, I would say, uh, I really don't have none.</p> <p><b>Nicole:</b> My favorite activities? Lunch (laughing).....</p> <p><b>Saye:</b> My favorite activities at school? I don't have no activities at school. I am more like a laid back person, but uh, yeah.</p> <p><b>Tracy:</b> basketball, chorus and football.</p>	Brown, Zvoch, Fortin, Lan, Cassidy	Sub 2, 3
<b>What kinds of things keep you from coming to school?</b>	Mueller,	Sub 2, 3

<p><b>Abby:</b> Uhm, stresses at home and other type things, waking up early in the mornings. <b>Interviewer:</b> So a more flexible schedule would help you?</p> <p>Yeah, that really would. <b>Interviewer:</b> Would you like it if school started later in the day even, where you could pick your different class times? <b>Abby:</b> Oh yeah, I think that would be a whole lot easier.</p> <p><b>Adakiss:</b> I mean, can't nothing keep me from coming to school.</p> <p>I would rather stay in school and get all my grades, my credits and stuff.</p> <p><b>Bernard:</b> Nothing can keep me from coming to school. If I had a family problem, yeah that might be one thing that would keep me from coming to school and if I had a real bad injury, that would be another thing that would keep me from coming to school.</p> <p><b>Gary:</b> Yes, suspension a lot.</p> <p><b>Chris:</b> Oh, boring classes, tests, boring the people in the class. Yeah, working late too.</p> <p><b>Destiny:</b> Other than instances of family emergencies or I'm not feelin good, I get up and come to school. It wouldn't be no point just stayin at home and watchin TV all day when I could be at school and not missin a lot of work.</p> <p><b>Fred:</b> Being suspended, oh yeah. Sleeping late, a little too late. Nuh uh, I don't have a job. I just go to sleep late.</p> <p>First rule we need to change is the tardies, like that's a big rule because I feel like they should focus more about us bein in school and doin work and you know what I'm sayin instead of trying to suspend everybody for tardies and like little stuff, little things like, I say like the five</p>	Lan	
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<p>tardy limit. When you get five tardies, you get a letter. It should be like when you get 15 tardies, you get a letter and like basically, it shouldn't be that serious.</p> <p><b>Nicole:</b> Besides getting sick?..... <b>Interviewer:</b> Do you get suspended? <b>Nicole:</b> From time to time..... Uh, mostly tardies.</p> <p><b>Saye:</b> Uhm, lack of sleep. <b>Interviewer:</b> Do you have a job?</p> <p><b>Saye:</b> Yes. School wise, nothin don't keep me from school besides me oversleeping or somethin like that or if I miss the bus and I don't have any ride to school.....that's the only thing.</p> <p><b>Tracy:</b> Sick, uhm death in family or opposed to some time when my mom be gone to work and I have to ride back to school and sometimes that do. Oh yeah, suspensions too.</p>		
<p><b>What is it like when you come back after being absent?</b></p> <p><b>Abby:</b> Like I have missed a lot and I feel that the teacher doesn't want to go back over things that I missed and it really affects my grades.</p> <p><b>Adakiss:</b> I mean, some people be happy that they been absent from school cause they probably get tired of it. Me, I would be glad to be back in school cause I ain't trying to miss so many days, but then I got to go out to the hospital or something or to the dentist or something like that. That is just my fault cause I probably was sick. I didn't get my teeth checked, I don't like that. I didn't miss school on purpose.</p> <p><b>Bernard:</b> I feel like it is another start, you starting again. It is coming all back to you, everything that you</p>	Zvoch	Sub 2,3

<p>learned to that point in time then and when you got out you remember at least half of the things. When you come back, you will know this. But, some people don't do it like that, they be off track sometimes and they don't even worry about school, but in the meantime when they come back around, it starts to get to them.</p> <p><b>Gary:</b> You are off track. You don't know what's goin on. You don't know what they learnt either and then you trying to play catch up to learn what you gotta learn and then do the work that you gotta do for that week.</p> <p><b>Chris:</b> I don't want to be here (laughs).....No, I don't.</p> <p>Because it is like I feel right coming to school is if the classes were interesting, if you like you didn't really have to stress taking the graduation test that is hard and like some of the stuff that is on the test, we not being taught and like some teachers don't even know.</p> <p><b>Destiny:</b> A lot of work.</p> <p><b>Fred:</b> Uh, I feel good. (See friends)Yeah.</p> <p>(School work) oooooooooohhhhhh, I feel bad cause it gets real exhaustin Nuh, uh, especially suspension wise, it says in the handbook you spose to get a certain time to make up work and some teachers they give you one to two days. Yeah, you spose to have five days, a whole week. Some teachers give you one to two days, that's not enough time to do all that work. And that's all a lot of work..... Uh, huh in all seven classes.</p> <p><b>Nicole:</b> Sometime, well it depends on how I'm feeling like when I get in the morning and I am in a good mood, then I would feel good about comin back to school and then after, well, okay, if I am feelin in a good mood and I</p>		
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<p>come to school and the teacher just like starts/stops me, then I be like okay, I wanna go back home so, therefore, I try not to let anyone bring my day down, but you know how it goes.....</p> <p><b>Saye:</b> Oh, so much I been done missed.....Oh, my God.....I have to catch up all my work. I been gone for one day, so like the work I missed, it feels like five days work, yeah, so that's about it.</p>		
<p><b>Do you get in fights at school?</b></p> <p><b>Abby:</b> I have.</p> <p><b>Adakiss:</b> No ma'am. I stay away from trouble.</p> <p><b>Bernard:</b> I don't get in fights. I get along with everybody.</p> <p><b>Gary:</b> I never got into no fight here. I had altercations in the past in like Middle School and stuff, but it wasn't nothing big.</p> <p><b>Chris:</b> No, not at Butler, no. Butler is a lot different than Glenn Hills. Glenn Hills it's like if you fight one on one, you would be straight. At Butler, they just jump.</p> <p><b>Destiny:</b> No.</p> <p><b>Nicole:</b> Not at school.</p> <p><b>Saye:</b> I got into a verbal altercation, but I didn't fight in school (laughing).....it's not professional. I can handle the outside but what I handle in school is just get suspended or go to jail.</p> <p><b>Tracy:</b> I only been suspended once before which was fighting really</p>	Hein	Sub 2,3
<p><b>How do these fights start?</b></p> <p><b>Abby:</b> Over "she say, he say" drama, stuff.</p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> But you don't do that any more? <b>Abby:</b> No.</p>	Hein	Sub 2, 3

<p><b>Chris:</b> It's a sad situation.</p> <p><b>Tracy:</b> Uhm, a little boy hit my sister and my sister was in kindergarten. He pushed her to the dirt and he was in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. We were both in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and he just kept picking on my sister and then he hit me so I fought him back.</p>		
<p><b>What kind of relationship would you like with your teacher?</b></p> <p><b>Abby:</b> I would rather have a teacher that is going to be there to talk to you through everything that you are supposed to do and actually take your questions seriously instead of just thinking that they are nothing.</p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> Oh, so you want a teacher to treat you like you have a valuable opinion? <b>Abby:</b> Yes.</p> <p><b>Adakiss:</b> I say I already got a relationship. We work together, we get along with each other and basically, we have fun together.</p> <p><b>Bernard:</b> Well, like a closeness, not so close cause I just don't like _____ like half and half, like if I forget something, she will take the time to tell me that I have to do this and correct myself. That is the kind of relationship I like with teachers.</p> <p><b>Gary:</b> Yeah, I don't like teachers who just write something on the board and be like alright, do it, ya know? I want somebody who when we come in the class room, they already energizing and maybe even having fun and making jokes, ya know? They in the mood to teach, but we got to get to the process of learning, ya know?</p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> Right, but do you like them to know you one on one?</p> <p><b>Gary:</b> Yeah, and take individual time and go around and</p>	<p>Fleming, Brill, Barton</p>	<p>Sub 2, 3</p>

<p>talk to everybody.</p> <p><b>Chris:</b> A good relationship, but not too friendly a relationship, but like friendly and a teacher who will still teach and help out.</p> <p><b>Destiny:</b> Uhm, just like if I needed somethin or when it comes down to my work, somebody that I could talk to. Yeah, a partner in learning?</p> <p><b>Fred:</b> A strong relationship (no hesitancy in answering) you know what I'm sayin, like I could talk to them bout anything and some of em, they could help me a little more and you know what I'm sayin, don't get me wrong, they some of them out there that you know what I'm sayin, they real helpful. I'm just talking about the ones that shouldn't even be a teacher.</p> <p><b>Nicole:</b> I mean, I don't really care, cause I'm gonna do me any way regardless how the teacher treats me or whatever, so, I don't really care, I don't really care.</p> <p><b>Saye:</b> I know this is about school and you know you have yo limits the way you talk to a teacher, but teachers, I mean, I should be able to sit down and talk to them about you know school work or otherwise what's goin on at school pertainin to me, you know what I'm sayin, but it's kinda hard for us students to do that. Why? I don't know, but yeah, so I would rather like for teachers to like sit down, both of us being open and basically talkin to you like a friend would.</p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> So, you want more open communication?</p> <p><b>Saye:</b> Yeah, I think that's what more of us students need cause you don't know whether or not they gettin it at home, so yeah. Come in the classroom and teachers actin like a female dog with some students you know who have</p>		
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<p>an attitude and they'll snap, but that's how things happen....they can't help it.</p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> Okay, so you like teachers who try to adapt a lesson</p> <p><b>Tracy:</b> In more than one way</p>		
<p><b>Tell me about teachers that listen to your opinion?</b></p> <p><b>Abby:</b> Well, I think that I do a lot better in their classes and I understand them a lot better than the teachers that just don't care. Cause it is very important when you can tell that a teacher cares about your education than when they don't. And, I think it would be a lot easier for the teachers to teach if the class rooms were smaller instead of being so big.</p> <p><b>Adakiss:</b> I mean if you got something to say and if a teacher will listen, she must really want to know what you got to say and get off your mind. But, some people want to get stuff off their mind and some teachers just don't want to listen, they just want to go on. I mean, other than that, they ought to just listen to us and see what we got to say. I mean like if we say anything negative or anything like that, we just got to get the word off our mind.</p> <p><b>Bernard:</b> It doesn't matter my opinion. Some teachers understand my opinion so that make us have good contact so like when I talk to them, they understand it. And when I talk to them so they understand it, they see how I feel and things like that. Yeah, like a lot of teachers try to make other kids in the school try to have some kind of future, but some kids just don't take that route, they just want to go their own. I am going to take mine. Yep, I am going to take mine.</p> <p><b>Gary:</b> A lot of them do. A lot of them like they really</p>	<p>Cassidy, Bates, Larson</p>	<p>Sub 2, 3</p>

<p>want to know what the students have to think besides what the parents, the PTA and all of that do...they want to know what the students think, that is who they are trying to reach is the students.</p> <p><b>Chris:</b> Oh yes, I do. I feel like that's a big..</p> <p><b>Destiny:</b> No, no not really, not on subjects</p> <p><b>Fred:</b> Uh, very respectful, I'll just tell you that.</p> <p>Oh yeah, because you know what I'm sayin, they showin me that they really care and I feel comfortable around them, like you know what I'm sayin, I can feel like I could talk to them about anything and they help me on work and real fair, real fair.</p> <p><b>Nicole:</b> Shhhhhh what teachers?</p> <p><b>Saye:</b> No, no, I am more like a laid back type and anything like they tell me how I feel about situations some will change into school work, like in journalism, like you doin a newspaper.....how do you feel about this and how you feel about that. I voice my opinion on that or whatever, but like feelings that I have towards me and outsiders, I am more laid back cause you can't trust people now a days.</p> <p><b>Tracy:</b> My literature teacher does. She listens to stuff like the form I got, she listens to that. You listen to my opinions too. My Spanish teacher does too cause I do like a lot of my work in her class and she is like so what can she do more to help me with my work or whatever. She listens to you.</p>		
<p><b>Is it important to you?</b></p> <p><b>Abby:</b> Yeah.</p> <p><b>Adakiss:</b> Yes.</p> <p><b>Bernard:</b> It is very important to me.</p>	<p>Culligan, Shepard, Hein</p>	<p>Sub 2, 3</p>

<p><b>Gary:</b> Yeah, because that's the teachers, they don't make it easy, but they make it better, ya know. They make it more fundamental so you wanna do it, ya know?</p> <p><b>Chris:</b> Yeah, it really is.</p> <p><b>Destiny:</b> Workin and what's goin on? Yes.</p> <p><b>Fred:</b> Oh yeah, it's very important.</p> <p><b>Nicole:</b> It would, it would be, it would be, it would help me like okay, it would just like to know that they are listening like I have something that I want to say and that they do take it into consideration and not just like, calling on me and okay and then call on somebody else, no, I want them to act on my opinion. You know, so.</p> <p><b>Saye:</b> Yes, then a no. I can, I mean, if we can talk like that, it's good. If we can't, that's good. I'm not really.....</p>		
<p><b>How do you know whether you really belong at school or not?</b></p> <p><b>Abby:</b> I feel that I belong at school because I want to be somebody.</p> <p><b>Adakiss:</b> I mean, you really don't know if you belong in school or not, but going by your grades and stuff they still look good and you know you already at school and you trying to pass, trying to go to college, trying to learn new things.</p> <p><b>Bernard:</b> I know I belong at school. Cause, I know I belong at school. I want to see myself like street-wise, I don't see myself like that.</p> <p><b>Gary:</b> I mean I like this school cause I been here a while and everybody knows me and don't nobody mess with me. I don't get in no fights, ya know.</p> <p><b>Chris:</b> You know, that is a hard question. Cause</p>	<p>Hein, Brown, Culligan</p>	<p>Sub 2, 3</p>



<p>sometimes I just feel like I don't but at the same time, I do. It is kinda hard to explain.</p> <p><b>Destiny:</b> I know I belong at school cause even though I might not learn a lot of information but some stuff sticks, you know what I'm sayin, how you learn a lot of stuff but it don't stick with you, but a lot of stuff have caused I learned a lot, just like when I finish all my math and that's my favorite subject. I used to struggle with it but then once I started really gettin into it and learnin, learnin and just listenin, that was the best thing.</p> <p><b>Fred:</b> Yeah. Yeah, I really belong at school (laughs). Yeah, this is the place, I want to see myself walk across the stage.</p> <p><b>Nicole:</b> I don't know. I just come, I mean it don't, I never thought about that, I don't know.</p> <p><b>Tracy:</b> Cause, I'm smart. I like school. I am not a person to stay out of school or flunk school.</p>		
<p><b>Who do you turn to when you need advice?</b></p> <p><b>Abby:</b> Uhm, your friends, your parents, both and some teachers.</p> <p><b>Adakiss:</b> Uh, I probably turn to my teachers or my Dad or my Mom or my friend basically that.</p> <p><b>Bernard:</b> I turn to my mom. My mom or teachers.</p> <p><b>Gary:</b> Uhm, Mr. L, the Guidance teacher and Mr. J, they my favorite two Guidance Counselors.</p> <p><b>Chris:</b> Oh man, to be honest with you.</p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> Your friend? <b>Chris:</b> And to be honest with you, I done told her everything that went wrong for me this year. Like for real, I done told her EVERY THING.</p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> That's your friend?</p>	<p>Brown, Brendtro, Fleming, Reid</p>	<p>Sub 2, 3</p>

<p><b>Chris:</b> Oh yeah, I call her my little sister too.</p> <p><b>Destiny:</b> My mom.</p> <p><b>Fred:</b> Uh, my mother. And my grandma.</p> <p><b>Nicole:</b> Nobody. <b>Interviewer:</b> What about grandma?</p> <p>No?</p> <p><b>Nicole:</b> I don't talk to her like that.</p> <p><b>Saye:</b> I have my sister for that. Like the only place I know that feels where I'm comin from is my sister. So, I can't look at the mentor, especially here and being that I'm older than you and I experienced more things, you can't tell me.....</p> <p><b>Tracy:</b> My mother.</p>		
<p><b>Do you have a mentor? Who or would you like one?</b></p> <p><b>Abby:</b> No. <b>Abby:</b> No.</p> <p><b>Adakiss:</b> No ma'am. I never did. I mean, if I am doing good in class, I probably don't need one.</p> <p><b>Bernard:</b> Yes, I do have a mentor, a teacher here in school.</p> <p><b>Gary:</b> Yeah, Mr. L is my mentor because he used to be like me. He says he used to play basketball and he didn't want to do his work and he used to go to sleep in class and all that other stuff, but once he realized and got his mind focused and he got to get out of this and do this and it was time to grow up, he was like, it was time to make a change.</p> <p><b>Chris:</b> Oh yeah, L. Oh yeah, he like a big brother to me.</p> <p><b>Destiny:</b> She be right there.(Mom)</p> <p><b>Fred:</b> Not really, you, Ms. Nigg.</p> <p><b>Nicole:</b> No.</p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> Would you like one, would you like to have someone to talk to?</p>	<p>Sheppard, Broussard, Brown</p>	<p>Sub 2, 3</p>

<p><b>Nicole:</b> I mean, I want them to talk to me cause they was listening and no cause I am their mentor and I have to listen to their problems. I don't want anybody to talk to me because of that. I want them to talk to me because they want to.</p> <p><b>Saye:</b> I don't know about dat. I know when I was goin through my time when my mom passed and I tried to sit down and talk to Mr. J and it just wouldn't feel right cause nobody don't understand what I'm goin through, but my sister cause she is goin through that process too and she's like her and my dad and my brothers are the only person I have that's really close to me in the family so, that's my mentor.</p> <p><b>Tracy:</b> Outside of home? Course some of them is friends. She is a college teacher, professor.</p>		
<p><b>How important would a mentor be in your life?</b></p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> So, that would not be important to you in your life?</p> <p><b>Abby:</b> I feel that it would, but I am not ready for one right now.</p> <p><b>Adakiss:</b> They would probably be important.</p> <p><b>Bernard:</b> Yeah, it's good, it's good.</p> <p><b>Chris:</b> To be honest with you, I have known L just about all my life. If it weren't for him, I would be done gave up on everything.</p> <p><b>Destiny:</b> Very, cause I need her (Mom) every day</p> <p><b>Fred:</b> Oh yeah, yeah, YES. a mentor.</p> <p><b>Nicole:</b> I mean it would be, but being that I don't have that, it's whatever, so.....</p> <p><b>Tracy:</b> Yeah, sometimes. It depends on what it is about.</p>	<p>Brown, Brendtro, Fleming, Reid</p>	<p>Sub 2 , 3</p>

Table D.3. contains the raw responses of students to interview questions relevant to sub-question 3 of this study: What conditions do at risk students feel are in their personalities that affect their academic success?

**Table D.3.** Sub-question 3 questions and answers.

<p><b>Has anyone asked you how you learn best?</b></p> <p><b>Abby:</b> No.</p> <p><b>Adakiss:</b> Some people, like teachers ask (about Special education)</p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> When did you get put in Special Education?</p> <p>What grade? <b>Adakiss:</b> Uhm, I think it started in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade.</p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> 6<sup>th</sup> grade? Did that help you?</p> <p><b>Adakiss:</b> I mean, it was no different than regular school. I still was doin the same thing everybody else was doin but overall, it helped me.</p> <p>mean, y'all helping me learn more than I can do on my own.</p> <p><b>Gary:</b> I learn good like two ways. I learn good when I am concentrating by myself, but I also learn good when I am having fun and interacting too.</p> <p><b>Chris:</b> Yeah, but they, I tried to explain it to them my way, but they just say that is not a good way.</p> <p><b>Destiny:</b> No.</p> <p><b>Fred:</b> No ma'am.</p> <p><b>Nicole:</b> You.</p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> Wow, I was the first? You are a senior?</p> <p><b>Nicole:</b> I am a senior.</p> <p><b>Saye:</b> No.</p> <p><b>Tracy:</b> My Spanish teacher. <b>Interviewer:</b> So, your Spanish teacher asked you how you learned best and did she</p>	<p>Cassidy, Larson</p>	<p>Sub 3</p>
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<p>incorporate the hands on?</p> <p><b>Tracy:</b> Yes, instead of just like giving us stuff off the board to write with, she will give us the worksheet and she will go over it and then she will put it on the board again and if you don't know how to do it, she will come and explain it.</p>		
<p><b>How do you feel the principals treat you?</b></p> <p><b>Abby:</b> I feel that he is a good principal but we could have better things to do at school that help us out in our grades and things like that.</p> <p><b>Adakiss:</b> They treat me as equal.</p> <p><b>Bernard:</b> They come at me respectful so I have the right to be respectful to them also.</p> <p><b>Gary:</b> The principal, I think he has been good this year. He usually singles me out for every little thing. It could be 30 people in the hallway but he see me and come here, ya know?</p> <p><b>Chris:</b> Oh, the principals they do an okay job. I think they are doing their job, trying to get safety right in the school.</p> <p><b>Destiny:</b> I never thought of somethin like that. I just see him walking around the hallways or either comin into class, checkin to see if somebody is usually in trouble.</p> <p><b>Fred:</b> Uhmhhh, I say some of em, not all of em. There's four, I say the majority of one or two principals is respectful, treat you with respect, they give you a fair deal, they give you a warning you know what I am saying, but the other two, I am not saying any names, but you know what I'm saying? It's like they don't really care about you. Some of them rush you, some of them don't pay attention to you and basically, what I don't like is favoritism and that's a lot. When they come to you, it has everything to do about favoritism.</p> <p><b>Nicole:</b> Okay, the principals, no, depressable? No, I don't</p>	<p>Fortin, Zvoch, Lan, Cassidy</p>	<p>Sub 3</p>

<p>say anything to the principals. They don't say anything to me, so I don't say anything to him, but now you talkin about principals overall or just the people who suspend me?</p> <p>Well the principals, the people that suspend me, he'll talk and you know and I try to reason with him to try to like give me lower days or whatever so I have to be home and uhmmm, they all right, I'm not gonna say they the best, but they all right.</p> <p><b>Saye:</b> It depends on what trouble I got in to or whatever. Sometimes, principals I know for a fact that don't have a good day and they will just take it out on students cause it happened to me before, like me and Mr. Q, we be up and down so many times, like it don't make no sense, but I mean, it happens. To me it depends on what's goin on with them outside and how they bring it, you know to school, the same thing with that. Like, I mean, I ain't no bad girl so I can't really tell you.</p> <p><b>Tracy:</b> He is not fair sometimes, but sometimes he can be fair. Like today I asked him for a _____ and he had everybody watch us over. When you are in high school, you shouldn't have to watch us over while we eat our lunch and stuff.</p>		
<p><b>How do teachers treat you?</b></p> <p><b>Abby:</b> Not all of them do what they are supposed to do and their attitudes are very bad.</p> <p><b>Adakiss:</b> They treat with me respect and I treat them with respect.</p> <p><b>Bernard:</b> The same way with respect.</p> <p><b>Gary:</b> My teachers, they treat me fairly good, like really good, especially, like the ones I might've had in another class because they know I am a good worker.</p> <p><b>Chris:</b> Oh some teachers, like they treat me very well. You</p>	<p>Fortin, Zvoch, Lan, Cassidy</p>	<p>Sub 3</p>

<p>got like a couple of teachers who they just probably be rude, but that's probably them being themselves, probably trying to be hard on the students, trying to prepare them for the workforce. That's what I think.</p> <p><b>Destiny:</b> Some teachers have a nasty attitude. I feel like that when you have a problem with them or it is just the way a teacher would talk to you, you know you think they goin through something, I feel like you know what I'm sayin, sometimes they feel like they take out for other kids messin up and bein bad, they will take it out on you. When you asks a question, they have a nasty attitude or if you say somethin and you try to correct or something you know what I'm sayin, not all teachers, but some teachers.</p> <p><b>Nicole:</b> Some of them are like, some of em show, some of shows favoritism on this hand and then some of them is like okay, well you just here and so I don't care if you do come to school or if you don't. I mean that's not their job to care, but you know what I'm sayin, it's just like okay well since I'm here, we might as well make the best of it. Okay, so, I don't know like I say they so and so. They have their little ways.</p> <p><b>Saye:</b> Uhm, some teachers, some teachers, the majority of the teachers, let's put it that way, they are you know, they cool, but there ain't no nother way, they some cool teachers then you have other teachers that don't like you period, you know what I'm sayin, that goes like with my brother, he has Mrs. S and she don't like my brother for not like nothin in the world, Why? I don't know and I know for a fact that my brother is not a trouble maker and I had her class before and she used to put me out all the time. She wrote things on write up slips that didn't come out my mouth or what not, right hand before God, so I mean, the majority of the teachers, they</p>		
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<p>cool, they tryin to get you out of school when other teachers, they know how long you been here and tryin to hold you back and it's like I be doin my hardest, but I feel like it's da teachers.</p> <p><b>Tracy:</b> 75% of my teachers treat me nice and well and the other 25% just fails to help.</p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> Tell me about how they fail?</p> <p><b>Tracy:</b> Uhm, you ask them a question and they get an attitude. Uhm, they don't like if you ask like how do you do it in a specific way because you can't learn it in another way, they will tell you a different way, but you still don't get it and then they will get angry and frustrated and they don't want to teach you no more at all.</p>		
<p><b>How do you participate in decisions that matter to your education?</b></p> <p><b>Abby:</b> Probably like my schedule and classes that I would need to take. Like it would be best to have like classes that you have in college in high school to better prepare you for college.</p> <p><b>Adakiss:</b> Yes. I do go to the Guidance Counselor to get my schedule changed and stuff like that because like some classes, they have already took a project, they gave me. I got me a lot of classes I can stick with it.</p> <p><b>Bernard:</b> Oh, say taking the classes that I really need to graduate from. Decide my own.</p> <p><b>Gary:</b> Yeah, I go up there and find out what I am taking and I find out if it is like, depending on if I don't like the teacher or something like that, I will try to get switched out of the class and get into another one with a new teacher that I have never had, ya know....so I can just start off fresh.</p>	Brown, Larson, Culligan	Sub 3



<p><b>Chris:</b> I make some of them. Mom is trying to make all of them.</p> <p><b>Destiny:</b> Oh yeah, some classes I want to take. I never have went to Guidance to ask them what kind of teachers cause I feel like it was just the same class, but a lot of people depend on</p> <p><b>Fred:</b> Oh, yeah, yes ma'am because I feel like you get a certain age, certain grade, they can't just put you in the class like that.....</p> <p>what teacher it is, but I wouldn't go for all that. You know what I'm sayin, I speak my mind and I tell em, I tell em, but some people hold back and that's....</p> <p><b>Nicole:</b> When I do pick my classes, I don't never get in them or I get taken out of them or something of that nature, I just.....</p> <p><b>Saye:</b> Yeah, you know I did that this year, cause it's like I passed all my math classes and I don't even like math and Mr. J was gonna give me Money Management and I said Mr. J, you want me to get out of (high school)? Don't give me Money Management. Cause I can't do another year of math. I want this year to be even though you know you have the graduation test and the end of course test, all these exams and pay your dues and just so much you gotta do for your senior year, it's like I want my classes to come smooth.</p> <p><b>Tracy:</b> Oh, about changing my class? I am going to change down because of negative vibes. Like I can't concentrate in a classroom of people that talk, scream and yell all day. If it is kind of quite, but sometimes it be kind of loud a little bit, I can concentrate like that, but too much drama is like not _____</p> <p>.</p>		
<b>Would you like to tell teachers/principals your opinions</b>	Cassidy,	Sub 3

<p><b>about school?</b></p> <p><b>Abby:</b> Oh yeah, I really would.</p> <p><b>Adakiss:</b> Yes. I would love to tell them what my opinion is. Last year. It felt like you was doing the right thing. It was fresh on my mind. You get all this knowledge out your mind and just tell ‘em what people want to do with other stuff. Like people just want to, like some people think school is a joke, but really it is not. Even though you at school, you can take it as a real world too because you in the real world, you not kidding, you are growing up and becoming a young man or a young woman or an adult or something like that. I felt like they was listening to me.</p> <p><b>Bernard:</b> I would tell them that things are going good. I get along with everybody. My grades and classes are good.</p> <p><b>Gary:</b> First they need to give us an extra two minutes to make it to our locker cause if you want us to come to work and be prepared to be on task and be all prepared, you can’t rush to class and then we don’t have all our materials and then we don’t have all our books and instead of us trying to get a tardy, we trying to come to class and forget our book, or forget our pencil or don’t bring enough paper or forget our homework, ya know? And then we can’t go get it because there are no passes out, ya know.</p> <p><b>Chris:</b> Just, I wish they could like, basically, show a better hands on than I was just readin out the book and giving book work cause that really don’t help nobody. You can’t remember none of that. You want all the little projects, _____ Mrs. P. We did projects in her class. That’s how I passed her class, cause I can remember.</p> <p><b>Destiny:</b> Yes, but like rules and no hair color and all that, it wouldn’t really matter cause when we have meetins, like</p>	<p>Brown, Larson</p>	
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<p>when we had a senior meetin and we wuz talkin about everything that wuz goin on and how we felt about stuff, it wuz good, ya know? They just wanted to hear what we had to say. It wouldn't, you know what I'm sayin.....</p> <p><b>Nicole:</b> No, but then again, yes, I would because you know they gonna do what they wanna do anyway, so why should I waste my time and my breath tellin them about what I think about school.....they just gonna, you know, decide against it and then they just gonna go do what they wanna do anyway?</p> <p><b>Saye:</b> I wanted to, like we was in fifth period, I say last week and I had Journalism and we have second lunch and you know how they always call them sweeps and stuff, then they will call a sweep, they call a lock down after our lunch, but you know they really need to call a lock down after first because kids be walkin around after lunch, they don't get to class, they get to class late and stuff and especially up here, I can hear the kids walkin up and down and you know I feel as though they need to have, if they have a lock down after second lunch, they need to have it after first lunch, cause that's what they mainly need right there. So, I do want to voice my.... I did want to voice my opinion on that, but I ain't never got to it, but that was just ridiculous and it's really not fair.</p> <p><b>Tracy:</b> Well, I guess. I like the school, but sometimes people can get out of hand there like when they say go to class or something like that and people still skip or something like that, but some of them, they just need to be more like to help people. The reason why they don't want to be in school is because the teachers sometimes don't want to help them and all that.</p>		
<b>What advice would you give new teachers?</b>	Cassidy,	Sub 3

<p><b>Administrators?</b></p> <p><b>Abby:</b> Don't try to be the students friends, but try to be there for your student to try to get them to better understand lessons that you go over. <b>Abby:</b> Uhm, I would want them to try to improve the school. I would want them to know that our school really needs improving. I think we should put more rules in effect and have probably some extracurricular activities and stuff like after school and fun stuff and a lot more technical classes.</p> <p><b>Adakiss:</b> Well, I would try to say, can we change the school around a little bit, change to different things.</p> <p><b>Bernard:</b> Just try to come together and try to get students to see that school is a more important thing in their life. Like try to talk to most of their parents. Like have meetings with their parents to know that the student is up to. See what I'm saying? Like when they come in with them, they have like a speaker talking about school is so important that you do this and do that, if you want to encourage them to be successful, you need good advice. Like Bernard, you are a good student, you are bright, you know what route to take, you know how to get out of situations and other things like that.</p> <p><b>Gary:</b> Don't just look at the one person and generalize that one person as the whole school. The whole school isn't bad. Most of the kids are not bad, they are not bad. It is positive things they do but it's negative things they do too, ya know and that's where school comes in, you gotta teach us to do the right thing instead of just doing the wrong thing. <b>Gary:</b> Well yeah before you get to that changing point, you could change like before they get to that point and that would stop them from going to alternative school or jail and wherever, just cause you helped them out. Whatever you teach them, that is</p>	<p>Bates, Brill</p>	
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<p>what's going to stick with us our whole life, ya know.</p> <p><b>Chris:</b> That just be yourself and then like some new teachers, they always act like they are afraid of the students. Some act like they are afraid. Some come in like they run a school. Just like be themselves, don't try to put on no act and like to get an impression of the students.</p> <p><b>Destiny:</b> Uhm, other than just rules wise you know what I'm sayin, they stress over hair color and what you have on, other than education, I would want to change that. I understand respect for each other and teachers we know that, but I am staying stressin over clothes and what we have on and what's goin on and how we do things and everything, I would like to change stuff like that. Uhm, don't let the children, don't get em, you know like how when somebody first get here, you let them take advantage of you then they just realize, you know what I'm sayin, they can just keep acting the same way and doin anything and treatin you any kind of way, don't let them off easy. When you know, how you come to them about a problem, like if the teacher kick you out of class, just like you have to go to the bathroom and you have to go real bad, they won't let you go to the bathroom and you just walk out of class and they have to write you up and they feel like they have to write you up just cause you had to go to the bathroom, but they can't understand that people have emergencies. They should have known that but they still write you up. I mean, you just can't go for everybody.</p> <p><b>Fred:</b> I would say they have to be respectful and learn from their mistakes and basically, I say have a good relationship with the students. I would change the rule about tardies, cut down the suspensions and start listening to students a lot. Because we are the future.</p>		
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<p><b>Nicole:</b> Okay, well, I don't want to say uh, let's see, advice? I would just tell them to keep they heads up and don't let the students, especially high school students especially, don't let them run em down or make them go home with a headache or stress and all that stuff cause I know students these days will do that. That is one reason I can't be a teacher, cause I can't deal with that.</p> <p><b>Saye:</b> Whewwwwww, my advice to teachers.....uh, hum, I say don't let the student intimidate 'em, I mean it depends if this they first year of teaching, but if you been teachin for a while, you should be used to students the way they react, but I say new teachers that's the first time comin out, you know new teacher, whew..... don't let the student get to you.</p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> Don't let them get to you.</p> <p><b>Saye:</b> Yeah, don't let them get to you cause man, they will turn a good teacher bad and.... And, I seen that happen before, you know what I mean.</p> <p><b>Tracy:</b> Stay confident. Don't catch attitudes very fast. Teach in more than one way. Don't let the kids get to you.</p>		
<p><b>What would your ideal school look like? Subjects, schedules?</b></p> <p><b>Abby:</b> Well, I would like, like I said have technical classes and other kinds of classes other than the simple ones that we have and just stuff to better our education and the schedule would have to be really flexible and wouldn't have to start so early.</p> <p><b>Adakiss:</b> For me? Let's say, you ain't got to worry about the dress code or nothing like that, we just got to get some of these gangs out of the schools and stuff. This is ruining everything in people's lives and stuff. It would probably be best if we get the gangs out and just have kids that know what</p>	Cassidy, Bates, Brill	Sub 3

<p>they are talking about and know what they want to do in their life and probably, you would have more security and stuff because..</p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> What do we do with the gang members? Do we just put them on the street or do we put them in a special school?</p> <p><b>Adakiss:</b> Probably, I would prefer to put them in a special school to help them and treat them right and know that a gang is not a good habitat to be in. It's just wasting the kids minds thinking that it's a life out there for them, but there really is a light out there for them, but not in a gang way. <b>Interviewer:</b> So, you are saying gangs are a lie?</p> <p><b>Adakiss:</b> Gangs... <b>Interviewer:</b> They lie to people....</p> <p><b>Adakiss:</b> Gangs are a lie, but it is just not the way to go. You are not do nothing but just getting more, just getting in trouble with the people that you work for. It's just. I can see me but on the other hand, I don't go with that stuff, I don't flow with that. I would just rather be who I am, what I am and how I am and what I do in my life.</p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> So, you make smart decisions.</p> <p><b>Adakiss:</b> I make smart decisions, but I don't make the wrong decisions.. I mean, let's see, some of the subjects are good to stay like math, you need to have science, you need social studies, you actually need but I say we could change some of the elective classes around. <b>Interviewer:</b> What would you like to have that we don't have?</p> <p><b>Adakiss:</b> You know, like people want to be chefs and stuff. We could change that and have two....</p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> Culinary and art classes?</p> <p><b>Adakiss:</b> Yeah, two culinary and art classes and people that like to draw. And yeah, have another art class.</p>		
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<p><b>Interviewer:</b> So, you want some more art and trade-type things that you can do in school that you can do when you get out?</p> <p><b>Adakiss:</b> Yeah, people who want to be archaeologists. Like have a class for that, like teach you things like geographics and all the hieroglyphics and stuff like that.</p> <p><b>Bernard:</b> Like regular schedules. Classes that people only take that they need to pass or graduate.</p> <p>Yeah, I would like (Apprenticeships)</p> <p><b>Gary:</b> Uhm, my ideal school would probably be you would start at 8, 7 is all right, but at least by 8 and we would have the same amount of classes, but between we would have enough time to go to our locker and all that and then our subject, that would really make school because some of this stuff, we ain't gonna use.</p> <p><b>Chris:</b> Basically, the same things they school have, but basically just say a classroom like a biology class, but in others like science class you got desks and books, like some tables and what not, like start doin some experiments and basically showing hands on work, more or less than book work. You could still do book work, not disrespect anybody who makes the books and things, but just like basically, your hands on work and then like as far as subjects, probably the same thing, but as far as the schedules-----not so early in the morning.</p> <p><b>Destiny:</b> All the subjects that we do have but a lot of free time when we could take a break instead of goin to class back to back, you know what I'm sayin? Like once I leave here I gotta go to Social Studies and after I go to Social Studies, I gotta go to Economics and then switch to another class, just give us more time and more space. Other than class wise, I</p>		
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<p>would make more career classes other than focusing on what we want to do cause not everything that we learn and we goin to each class for, it don't have everything to do with you know what I'm sayin with what's gonna go on when you get out of here. So, I feel like we need classes that are based on what job we want to have and what we trying to get in..... Yeah, other than the other stuff that really doesn't matter.</p> <p><b>Fred:</b> More time.....uh, fair work, well not easy work, but fair work. You would have different classes, like you know what I'm sayin, like anything a student would want, like college work, you could have those classes. Like Day Care, have a Day Care and the school. Construction. Have a workshop in the school where you build wood and..... You'd get paid. I would have two principals for the whole school cause I feel you don't need too much principal, it's not really a lot of discipline. Nuh, uh, cause only good kids could get in my school (laughs) cause that's how I feel. Uh, school needs to be cleaner, I can tell you that, they need to be cleaner, cause they got all this fungus and mildew and ..... Cause you can learn better if it is clean around you, really, cause that just throw you off basically cause students, if it's dirty around you, they worry about nastiness, fungus and catchin things. So, basically, that's a destruction, disruption, in your work</p> <p><b>Nicole:</b> My ideal school wouldn't be like this, I can tell you that. My ideal school would be you know, it wouldn't be a small school, but then again it wouldn't be a really, really big school. It would just be like, I don't know, it would be a good school like where people can learn and really like give students a real, real reason to come to school here and learn instead of just coming to school and just talking and playin. But, em.....</p>		
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<p>I would have a Driver's Ed class for one (so I could get my license quicker)..... Uh..... If some of these students don't know, so I would have a sex ed class for two..... uh..... Nurse's aide, especially nurse's aide, okay and you know, you know, I would take Social Studies out and I would not replace Social Studies, I mean it would probably be the same, but you know I would put in a Black History Class in there.....so I would throw that in there, cause I don't think we have one of those here and uhm....I think that is about it.. I would shorten at least every class, at least classes are like 45 minutes to an hour, aren't they? 50? Yeah, I would definitely shorten that cause in some classes you just don't do the thing and you know, sometimes it gets boring, besides sleeping or talking or whatever, you know? Maybe some students just get tired of doing that, but you know how that goes, so uhm....I would at least shorten every class at least by 15 or 20 minutes and get out of school..... Yeah, then again, shortening the days will give people more opportunity to get in trouble and that is what we don't need.... So.....</p> <p><b>Saye:</b> My ideal school, oh, boy! Let's see, uhmmmmmm classes wouldn't be that long and there would be no sweeps and instead of five minutes gettin to class, I say at least ten minutes and uhm, you know most people don't eat school lunch.....so I feel as if they can go off campus, but they have to be back a certain time, you know what I'm saying..... that, let's see.....</p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> You want to be treated like an adult?</p> <p><b>Saye:</b> Basically, I mean specially us seniors, it's our last year and we fidnin to go out there to the real world, well I'm already out there in it, so I experienced it cause I'm already out there in it, but the other kids that haven't experienced it</p>		
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<p>yet will and you know, I feel as though.....</p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> That's a good idea. It would give them the baby stuff without being free and just thrown out there.</p> <p><b>Saye:</b> Yeah, but bein how kids are, they, they, they just mess up stuff, they mess up they privilege, they will probably, you know what I'm sayin, if we do have somethin like this, like leavin campus, they probably won't come back and if they come back, they probable gonna be late and yes, that too and you know we just lose our privilege.....</p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> So, you want a school where kids are more responsible.</p> <p><b>Saye:</b> Basically, but you can't tell em that. So..... but that's my ideal school.</p> <p><b>Tracy:</b> I would have a school for like six buildings. It would have one side for foreign languages, another side for different types of math instead of just a big class of one math, to have many maths and different subjects and stuff like in every different section like, so it don't all be together like you would actually have somewhere else to go so classes don't be so filled up and having so much drama.</p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> Oh, so you want small class sizes. What about the schedules. Do you like getting up at 7 and leaving at 2:30 or would you <b>Tracy:</b> Yeah, cause I don't like getting up at 6 o'clock cause our bus come at 6:38, so I don't like getting up that early.</p> <p>e something more flexible. <b>Interviewer:</b> What about year round school? <b>Tracy:</b> No, I don't think I would like year round school. All you get to stay is in school all year around with different breaks</p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> With different breaks between semesters</p> <p><b>Tracy:</b> Yeah, you get out on different breaks and stuff. It just</p>		
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be longer. I don't think I would want to go to year round school.		
<p><b>When did you first notice you were having trouble in school? What grade were you in?</b></p> <p><b>Abby:</b> 9<sup>th</sup>. Yeah, cause when you are in 9<sup>th</sup> grade it is really hard and you really don't understand exactly what is going on cause you are in a different place and everything and it would be easier if they had stuff like more for the 9<sup>th</sup> graders. The freshman and stuff.</p> <p><b>Bernard:</b> Yeah, a couple of times. But when I broke it down, I started to get everything, but like when I didn't get everything, I just didn't pay attention that much.</p> <p>9<sup>th</sup> grade.</p> <p><b>Gary:</b> 9<sup>th</sup> grade when I got my freedom. Like, but no really I can't even say that because. Middle school, I got suspended, but I ain't not ever got suspended like this, every other week. Like when I really got to high school, that is when it really got tough when I was getting suspended every other week or then I be sick, then I come back and I be so off track that I just be like skip that class, I will just pass all the rest of them, ya know?</p> <p><b>Chris:</b> When I got kicked out of Glenn Hills and came to Butler and they told me my grades. My second semester in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade.</p> <p><b>Tracy:</b> This year. <b>Interviewer:</b> This year? <b>Tracy:</b> In math.</p> <p><b>Interviewer:</b> 9<sup>th</sup> grade, you said you were held back before?</p> <p><b>Tracy:</b> In kindergarten.</p>		